THE GARDEN OF RESURRECTION

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THE PATCHWORK PAPERS

THE GARDEN OF RESURRECTION

BEING THE LOVE STORY OF AN UGLY MAN

BY

E. TEMPLE THURSTON

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TO

W. R. DAKIN, M.D.

My Dear Dakin,

Partly because you have a love of gardens, partly because together we have seen Ballysheen when the gorse was in its full blast of yellow, but most of all because I feel I owe you a debt of gratitude for a great friendship, I am asking you to accept this book of mine. It was after a talk with you one night that I went straight home and wrote Chapter I on a clean sheet of paper, therefore the book is doubly yours and I ask you to accept it in proof of the fact that, not only am I grateful, but also that I am

Your sincere friend,

E. Temple Thurston.

Adelphi, 1911.

BOOK I

THE GARDEN OF RESURRECTION

CHAPTER I

It was the first, the very first, day of spring. A man walked by me with a narcissus in his coat and he was humming a tune.

By the looks of him—the tail-coat, the bowler hat, the little leather hand-bag—he was an artisan. You know that game of placing people. I put him down as an electrician. He had been attending to a job up West. He was returning to the premises of his firm in Bond Street. All this, of course, was surmise. But of one thing I was certain. He had no business to be walking through the Park. He ought to have been on a 'bus, or in the Underground Railway, speeding back to save his firm's most precious time, ready to start forth once more upon his firm's most urgent errands. Instead of this—it was the first day of spring—he was walking through the Park and I was envying him. I envied the narcissus in his coat. Even the very tune he was humming touched a sense of covetousness in my heart.

"Nor his ox," thought I, "nor his ass, nor anything

that is his." A very stern Commandment that; for even as I took off my silk hat and brushed the rim of it once with my sleeve, I envied him for his tail-coat and his billy-cock.

It was little enough to want of any man, his tail-coat or his billy-cock, his narcissus or the tune set humming from his heart. I did not want his leather bag at all. He could keep that. Yet it seemed that I was to break the tenth decree of Moses to its last letter, or, since I was going backwards, to its first; for after he had gone by some thirty yards or so, I was envying him for something else altogether.

A few moments before he came, a little nursemaid had wheeled her pram down the path where I was sitting. She was one of those rosy-cheeked creatures who come up from the country to grow pale in London, just as the flowers come up of a morning to Covent Garden and wither perhaps before the night is out. She must have been very new to it all, for she had all the country freshness about her still. Her cheeks glowed in the quick, bright air. Her hair blew loosely over her forehead—through the stray, fine threads of it her eyes danced, glittering with youth. I remember now of what it must have reminded me. You have seen those spiders' webs, caught on the points of furze which, early on a crisp May morning, glisten with drops of dew? Those eyes of hers through her hair reminded me of that. And as she passed me by, leaning forward again and again to whisper to that fat, round baby in the pram, she chanced to look at me.

You must take my word for it that it was not from any thwarted desire to draw her into conversation that the expression in those eyes of hers chilled me. I have never had the courage or, which again, I envy so much in others, the presence of mind which brings knowledge to a man, that a woman would answer if he addressed her in the street. I believe there are many women, the most virtuous in the world, who have had little adventures of this kind. God knows, life would be dull without such interludes. But as yet no such woman has come my way. It were better put if I said that I have never come hers. Therefore, there was no desire on my part to say a word to this little nursery maid; yet the swift look in her eyes made a thrill of coldness quiver through me. That a woman looks her disapproval of you can be borne. But it is hard to bear, that look in a woman's eyes which sees you not at all; when in one woman's face you read the disapproval of her whole sex.

I don't know why it should have struck me so strangely that morning, for I am used to it by now. I have known it so long. In any case, it is not a thing to talk about. You have it there in that nursery maid's eyes. I am an ugly devil, not even with that ugliness which pleads a charm to many a woman's heart. I am an ugly devil, and that is all there is about it. The only creatures who have ever gazed at me as though I were the image of God were my mother and my dog. The one is dead. I have only to stretch down my hand from my chair and the other will gaze at me in such

fashion now. He sat upon a chair next to me that morning and, as I paid his penny to the collector, he gave me a glance from his brown eyes which I chose to take for gratitude. He thanked me—why not? He had not got any pennies with him. There are times when I am that way myself.

Now, when the nursery maid's eyes had passed me over, they looked at Dandy and her whole expression changed. I caught the sign of friendliness, the gentle come-hitherly glance which I know is the first step in those little adventures leading to chance acquaintanceship. For that look he would have spoken to her had he been a man—by reason of that look, had he been a man, she would have answered him. As it was, only his tail wagged; but she did not see that. And so she passed on while Dandy and I sat gazing after her.

I will not depart into reasons as to why I called him Dandy. This incident alone will serve to tell you why. He was a dandy and so much better-looking than I, wherefore I gave him that name—an unnecessary yet unconscious criticism of myself.

It was a moment or two after this that my electrician strolled by and I began to envy him. Dandy and I both turned our heads to watch him out of sight, and then it was that I coveted most of all those things which were his. For this was what happened. When she had reached the end of the path, had stood a moment to watch the horses as they turned and started their canter once more down the Row, the little nursery

maid wheeled round her pram and began retracing her steps.

"Dandy," said I, and his eyes shot round to mine, "they're going to meet."

We watched them closely as they passed.

"I wonder how she looked at him," I muttered. "If he turns, we shall see. Will he turn? Will he turn?"

Dandy's tail wagged, and he turned.

But that was not all; for, as he looked over his shoulder, the little nursery maid whipped round as well, and in the electrician's eyes I saw a smile. When then she turned her head about, I saw a smile there too. Twice they looked back over their shoulders, after which the electrician's steps grew slow. I settled myself back in my chair, so that they should not guess I had seen; for I was really interested by this. The premises of that firm in Bond Street were getting further away with every step he took in their direction. Another hesitating stride or two and they had vanished out of sight altogether. He had turned and was coming back.

For the third time the little nursery maid looked over her shoulder. Oh, you should not say she was leading him on. Such a thought as that never enters a woman's head. She is only curious to see what will happen. When, for instance, as in such a case as this, a woman looks back at you when you have passed, it is not to encourage you to look back at her, it is only to see if you are. But no woman will ever persuade a man to

learn that; what is more, no woman would ever be so foolish as to try. It is a man's mistaken ideas about women—or it is love, if you like that better—which makes the world go round.

I could see that my little maid had not the faintest conception of what would have been the result of her glances. Any one might have seen it, for directly she understood that he was following, a great leaping of her heart quickened her steps and she came past me once more, wheeling the pram so fast that the fat, round baby jumped and jumped again.

And all this sudden increase of pace was in order to escape him. Not for one moment was there a desire in the heart of her to be caught. Indeed, in her face there was a set determination that she should not be overtaken—and certainly not opposite me.

Now whether she kept up this pace or not, I am in no position to say. The movement of a receding figure—I speak almost in terms of physical laws—is well-nigh impossible to estimate. I feel sure, however, that she did. The only means therefore by which I can satisfactorily justify the result in my mind is by the assumption that he must have been walking quicker than she. Whichever it was, he caught her.

He had forgotten his tune as he came by me. I think it was quite right of him. When life is holding out to you its greatest possibility, that is no time for humming a tune. Nevertheless, he did his best to look unconcerned. He pretended he had forgotten something at that house in the West End. In fact,

as he passed me, he took out his watch and distinctly I heard him say—"Sch! Sch!"

"Splendid fellow," I said to Dandy. And so he was. I would have given much to be in need of such little deception myself. Someone else's romance, however, is very engrossing when it happens that you have none of your own. Dandy and I followed him secretly with our eyes as he sailed down the path like a bold man-o'-war in pursuit of his capture. I say, secretly. There was no secrecy about Dandy. He jumped off his chair and, standing in the middle of the path, he looked directly after them. At least, I think it was after them. There was another dog in sight, but he was very far away.

However that may be, we were not permitted to see the most interesting part of it. She was quick and she was cunning in her manœuvres, was that little nursery maid. Before I could have contemplated the action, she had put about and was off up the path which turns sharply to the right and leads into the solitary heart of the Park. That pram went round that corner bumping on two wheels. I saw the fat, round baby clinging to the sides. Then, sure enough, round went my electrician after her and, but for Dandy, the Park seemed empty once more.

"Well," said I, "that's all there is to that," and I leant back again with disappointment in my chair. There was no such thing as following them. It was not to be done. Love is a timid thing at such a stage as this, and I would not have frightened it for the

world. I will confess that I enjoyed the thought that it was generous of me. I fancy, moreover, that Providence, who superintends all these matters, thought so too. In any case, she gave me my reward.

It was a good hour later. Hundreds of men and women had passed by in that time for me to look at —nearly as many dogs for Dandy. I had well-nigh forgotten my electrician when, happening to look down towards that sudden corner, I saw him hurry round it and make to come past me once more. I smiled in gratitude to Providence, but my reward was not full even then. He had an unlighted cigarette in his mouth, and, seeing me once more, knowing I was a friend no doubt, he stopped and asked me for a match. I took out my box.

"Did you find what you wanted?" said I, as he lit his cigarette.

He threw away the match and looked at me.

"I beg your pardon," said he.

"'Twas only," said I, "that you passed me here about an hour ago. You passed me twice. First time you were going out of the Park, the second time you came back. I saw you look at your watch. I imagined that you'd left some instrument at the house up West where you'd been working. You were evidently annoyed at the waste of time."

His eyes opened in some sort of amazement.

"Very quick of you to have noticed it, sir."

"Well—not very," I replied. "I sit here in the Park most mornings and amuse myself that way."

He gave me back my match-box.

"Well—that was just about it," he said. "I'd been fixing some blinds ready for the summer."

"Blinds for the summer," I echoed, "there's a sound about that."

He smiled broadly as he thought of it.

"By the way," said I, "you've lost your narcissus."

He looked down quickly at his coat.

"Sch! Sch!" he said again, and with that turned and went away. I think he was beginning to mistrust me. He explained as he left me that he was in a great hurry. I have no doubt he was.

Now that really was the end of it, and for that I broke the very first letter of the tenth decree of Moses. For that lost narcissus, I envied him most of all. But when I say that I confess to envying him his little nursery maid, I simply mean that I envy every man his womenfolk, and the mood was heavy on me that morning. This little incident served only to make it the heavier. But for this incident, in fact, I might never have taken up my pen; certain it is I should never have gone forth on that wild, mad errand which is to become the subject of these pages.

Indeed, nothing less than this had happened—my electrician and his nursery maid had superinduced a mood, a growing, convincing belief that it was not worth while going on. I said aloud that there is nothing more lonely in this world than a lonely man. I made the remark to Dandy. I dared not tell it solely to myself, it would have been too real.

"There's nothing more lonely, Dandy," said I, "in this world than a lonely man."

Dandy stretched out a paw for my hand. He kept beating the air until he got it. When I felt his cold little pads in my palm, I added an amendment—"Unless it be a dog that is lost."

Confident then that in that short statement we had compassed the woes of the whole world, there came a momentary relief. It did not last for long. That vulture of a mood flapped its wings again and settled down once more to feed upon our minds. Neither Dandy nor I could shake him off. For this is the way with dogs, as you know well enough who have one. They are partners for better or for worse in the little limited company of hopes and fears that you see fit to float upon the world. The more shares are taken up, the better it is for you, the more going a concern it will be. But every human being has his own company and every one his own allotment. By which you may so easily understand that every man himself is his largest shareholder. Often, indeed, he marries and takes a partner; but even she has floated some little company of her own.

Now it is not this way with a dog. Take a dog into partnership and he halves your losses and your profits to the last. Little deals of his own, little speculations he may make in the street when the real business of the day is done. But during those working hours on 'Change when the vital affairs of life are afoot, there is he by the side of you, ready to laugh with you at the

profits of your hope, ready to despair with you at the losses you had feared.

Dandy was sharing my losses with me that morning. So fast as depression set in upon me, so surely did his little ears droop down, his head hang lower and his tail fall limp. Why, even when some beautiful lady smiled at him as she passed, he turned away. I would have sworn he closed his eyes.

"My God," said I, in a supreme effort, "this'll never do," and at that moment came my doctor through the Park. I held up my hand in salute. It was more than a salute. I beckoned him to stop and speak to me. He got down from his car; came across and sat beside me.

"Lazy, lucky devil," said he.

I nodded my head. All men call me that.

"Do you ever give consultations in a place like this?" I asked.

He would have made me a professional answer had I not stopped him.

"Talk away," said he, and I talked.

It is marvellous how subtle and how eloquent one can be over the description of one's ills when there is really nothing the matter at all. I talked for ten minutes.

"It comes to this," said I, in conclusion, "every man jack of us is over-civilised. We're like a breed of race-horses that has outbred the strain which made it famous. We're over-bred."

He nodded.

"The worst of consultation in a place like this," said he, "is that I can't look at your tongue."

I don't suppose that Dandy heard this. In any case the sun was burning down on his head. Whichever it was, a broad smile wrinkled his face and his tongue lolled out. I pointed to him.

"You can look at that," said I; "we live the same sort of lives. Nothing the matter with that, is there?"

"Well—of course—it's an obvious thing to say," he began.

"I want a change?"

"That's it. A complete change of place."

"You're wrong," said I. "I want a complete change of time. I want to go back to a hundred years ago."

"Yes," he agreed, "better still, but I can't advise you how to get there. No—look here—it's not too late. Run off to Italy for a week or two—drop down into Sicily—take your time over it—get out of the train and walk if you like—and don't go alone."

"I shouldn't," said I.

"You know of someone?"

I looked down at Dandy. Dandy looked up at me.

"But I shan't go," I said. "You haven't diagnosed the disease. You don't seem to realise the worst symptom of it all."

"What's that?" he asked.

I shrugged my shoulders.

"I'm an ugly devil," said I.

CHAPTER II

ITALY was no good to me. I had done it all before. There are not many corners in Europe of which Dandy and I are ignorant. I have seen his little footmarks in the snow and the dust in places where few of your so-called travelled folk have ever been. For my sake he has cheerfully suffered quarantine in half the ports of the south. I know Odessa as if I had been born there, waiting for Dandy's release. And when at last he did come out, a mere shadow of what he was, his ribs, a scale of them, protruding from his sides, he executed so violent a war dance of joy as exhausted all the strength left in him. In two minutes he was lying breathless in my arms.

I swore to him it should never happen again. "A man wouldn't put up with it, Dandy," said I. "Why should you?"

I think he saw the force of it all at the time; but when a few months of good feeding had gone by and I was for setting off East once more, he had forgotten all about Odessa.

"No, you're not coming this time," I said to him. He shook his tail and laughed. He didn't believe me. "Oh—that's all very well," I went on, "but remember

that God-forsaken spot, Odessa," If you please, he laughed again. "I don't care," said I. "You're not coming. Get off that box, it's going to the station."

In time he began to realise it. There came a gradual dropping about his ears. He found his coat-brush in the corner where it always was. His leash was still hanging in the hall. I could see him thinking it out, with a puzzled frown between his eyes as if he were saying—"There's some mistake. He forgets I went with him last time—of course, there's some mistake" —whereat, half-convincing himself that there was, his ears pricked up and he began his get-ready-to-go-out dance, a wild exhibition of terpsichorean art, on his hind legs.

"You're not coming, Dandy," said I, and I looked him steadily in the eyes. At last he knew, and I had to turn away. It was too piteous, the expression then that twisted his face.

With his tail a limp and a foolish-looking thing, he stood upon the doorstep and saw me drive off. I waved a hand out of the window at him, but I could not look back.

It was that wave of the hand that did it. He knew I had been playing him a joke. There I was, beckoning to him just be ore it was too late and, roaring with laughter—so I am told—to think how nearly I had taken him in, he leapt after me.

When I got out of the taxi at Victoria, to my amazement, there he was, splashed with mud behind our wheels from nose to tail.

"A jolly good joke!" he roared. "A jolly good joke! I knew there must have been some mistake." And so there was, but the poor little devil had to pay for it at Algiers.

What good then was Italy to us after such journeys as these? We walked back home to lunch that morning, Dandy forlorn, I with the taste of envy still lingering in my mind.

How can I explain? Life has never reached me. No woman has ever come to me in trouble—and that is part of life; no man has ever told the story of a love affair to me in the whole course of my existence. Whenever a man sees me he slaps me on the back; whenever I meet a woman whom I know, she pats Dandy on the back instead. And to suggest Italy for such a disease as that!

A night or two later, I strolled into a restaurant where occasionally I sup alone. The young man and the young woman go there. Corks fly out of bottles and laughter flies after them. Sometimes there I can imagine I have never seen forty, and when I assure myself that I am forty-three, it seems nothing—nothing at all. The waters of Lethe are in the very finger-bowls on their tables, though often indeed, as I have rubbed it on my lips, it seems I have tasted the waters of Marah. That night after supper, I sat in the lounge outside, taking my coffee. At the other end of the settee I had chosen sat a woman of twenty-eight, listening patiently to the egotism of a boy of twenty-six. Here and there she placed a word with cunning

knowledge of his kind. Now and again she laughed, when immediately rose his empty bark above it. At times he laughed all by himself.

"I suppose I shall have to marry her one of these days and settle down," I heard him say, and from that moment my ears caught no sound other than their two voices; his in limping, stilted narrative, hers in encouraging assent.

It was a story no man has the right to tell. Told to a woman, it set the blood racing in my veins till it tingled hot and furious in my very fingers. It seemed he had been to the West Indies, trading in what I don't know and care less. And there, no doubt, with what we call the superiority of our European civilisation, he had captured the affections of a planter's daughter.

I caught her name, just her Christian name, as he disclosed it. Clarissa—only Clarissa—I heard no more. He was one of those youths who must give you names to make his story true. And how Clarissa loved him! Behind all his boasting and that barking laugh of his, I could see how well she loved him too. Could it have been anything but love that had brought her from her sunny islands to that grey land of Ireland where he had taken her?

I thought of Mary Queen of Scots, exiled from her golden France to those dim mists of Scotland, the greatest tragedy the world has ever seen. Only the need of history to make this as great a tragedy as well.

In the care of his two aunts he had placed her.

"And there she'll have to stay for some time. She

wants educating," said he, and forthwith he proceeded to recount her little ignorances, her little follies, her little mistakes, at each of which he threw back his head and laughed.

"She knows nothing," he continued; "not that I think a woman ought to know much. But she knows absolutely nothing. I had thoughts of her coming over here to school. But she's too old for that; besides, she's nicely tucked away there in Ballysheen."

The name struck quickly on my ears. Ballysheen? Why was it familiar? One of those tricks of sense, perhaps. You know an Irish name anywhere. But I had no inclination then to follow it out. I beckoned my waiter for another Kümmel. My empty glass betokened idleness. I could see the woman's eyes wandering in my direction. The man would never have suspected me of listening, for when a man tells a story, the sound of it absorbs him. Women, I find, are different to that. They are ever aware of the thousand things about them.

"How is she going to be taught?" she asked when her suspicions were allayed by the filling of my glass.

He inhaled deeply of his cigarette and slowly blew out the smoke between pursed lips. "Oh—they'll teach her," said he.

And they—were his two maiden aunts. From his ill-phrased description of them, I could see it all. He had caught a bird of brilliant plumage in the wild heart of a tropic forest, and to a cage one foot by three he had brought her; a cage hung in some dull drab

room, where never the light of the sun could enter. Behind the bars of their little bigotries and their little prejudices, this poor untamed creature was beating her tired wings, or she was sitting there waiting with watching eyes for him to return and marry her.

It was not the manner of his telling that made the story real. It was the place. That glare of lights, those sinuous sounds of music that crept upon one's ears, all the blatant artificiality of it, and this casual narrative told with a laugh and a glass to the lips! You hear strange conversations in public places; but I had never heard anything more strange than this.

Her father was wealthy, so it seemed. It was this that had attracted him to the match.

"She'll have ten thousand, when we marry," he continued; "worth thinking about, you know. And more when her father dies. But there's one ghastly drawback. I got used to it over there; but since I've been back in England—talking, for instance, to women like yourself—I sometimes wonder how the devil I'm going to do it."

I held my breath and strained my ears to listen. It is when you know what is coming that you are keenest of all to hear.

"You don't mean to say she's black?" said his companion, in horror.

Back went his head and he laughed right down my spine.

"Good Lord! No! You don't think any amount of money would tempt me to marry a black, do you?

I hate that sort of thing as much as anybody. No, she's beautiful enough, but she's coloured. There's the strain in her. Three generations back there was a black in the family. In most of them it's worn itself all out completely, but she's a set back. You can see it. Her hair's as black as pitch. Not a mat, thank God; it's fine enough. Her skin's quite olive, too. The whites of her eyes are that blue-white of old china. She's got the taste, too, for gaudy coloured things. Wanted to dress herself in canary-coloured satin when she first came to Ballysheen. My aunts soon put a stop to that. Oh, I've no doubt they'll teach her in time."

I think just that touch made me see it most of all. The little creature putting on her bright plumage, the very colours which Nature gives to those whose home is in the sun, and then to have them stripped from her, and in their place the dull religious black of these grey countries given her to wear. Oh, no doubt, they would teach her quickly enough, those two old maiden aunts of his. Her school-room roof would be the lightless skies of grey—one quickly learns a lesson of obedience, the obedience of despair, in such a room as that. Ready to their hands would be all the forms of chastisement that can so soon break down a spirit from the sun. Just that canary-coloured satin made me see it most of all.

And what did his aunts think of it all, I wondered. It was as if I had wondered aloud, for his companion echoed the question to my thought.

He shrugged his shoulders and beckoned lazily for his bill. "Can't help what they think," said he. "Matter of fact, I don't believe they like it at all. We're an old family, you see. The Fennells have been in Ireland since Cromwell. He gave us our estates, every inch of which has gone. The only property left is the old house my aunts live in. They'll be glad enough if I get a rich wife. For that reason I suppose they put up with her; but it goes against the grain. In Ireland, you know, a drop of black blood is the greatest curse you can have. They won't let any one get a glimpse of her. I can tell you, it's a mystery over there. Everybody knows there's some one staying in the house—but they won't let her be seen. Rather rough on her, you know. They take her out for walks when it's dark—make her put a veil over her face. You wouldn't believe it in a cosmopolitan place like London; but it makes all the difference over there."

I heard no more than that. I could wait to hear no more.

"My things," said I to the attendant. He wanted to pull down the collar beneath my coat. I could not have borne that. It was a matter of walking home to Mount Street. There are times when the more civilised methods of progression have no meaning at all. There are times when one must return to Nature and use one's legs. I walked home, and all the time there sang in my head that phrase—no woman has ever come to me in trouble.

"My God," thought I. "If ever there was a woman in trouble!"

And then the name Clarissa—Clarissa—called itself back into my mind. Clarissa, with her little gown of canary-coloured satin.

CHAPTER III

THEY can be cold, those nights in April, for spring comes timidly to this little island of ours. I have seen children, like her, peep round a door. There is laughter in their faces; it flows in a silver ripple, quivering shyly on their lips. For one instant they look in on you and then are gone. It is no good your calling. Nothing under Heaven will induce them to come back. Perhaps the next morning at the very same hour the door will open gently, you will see the sudden flash of eager eyes, but never again that day. It were as well you gave up hope of it. And so comes spring in such fashion to us here.

That very morning I had been sitting again in the Park. The sun was of pure white silver in a sky of blue. There was that cool, faint sense of chill about it, too, as when you see the flame of candles freshly lit. The daffodils under the trees lifted high their yellow petals from the grass to try and touch the warmth of it. Yet it only lasted for an hour or two. I looked down at Dandy as a grey cloud sailed up above the trees and hid the sun, and I saw a little wrinkle quiver swiftly up his back.

"Ah, my friend," said I, "I've no doubt you'd like

Nature to spoil you. We all do; but, unfortunately, she won't."

I am always making these little reflections aloud to Dandy. It is not that he understands, but they do such a heap of good to me.

By night time that grey cloud had drawn a score of others after it. When I came out of the restaurant after supper the wind was scouring the streets with a shower of rain. As I walked home I thought with gratitude of the fire that I knew was burning in my room. My steps quickened as I pictured to myself the sight of Dandy lying curled in a complete circle upon the hearthrug. What manner of person, I wondered, would rise to his feet from such a comfortable position as that and greet you rapturously upon your entrance, put his hands on your wet coat and say between cavernous yawns and jovial laughter how jolly glad he was to have you back again? Perhaps there was one in the world who would have greeted a man like that.

Clarissa.

Ah, but there would be more than laughter, there would be those uncontrollable tears of gratitude if Clarissa's lover came back to her that night. Perhaps she had not even a fire by which to curl herself into the complete circle of contentment. No doubt at such an hour as that she was fast asleep in her tiny bed —or was she lying awake with eyes set deep into the darkness, listening to the ceaseless driving of the rain upon her window? Wherever she was, whatever

doing, I could see the joy, lit radiant in her face, at the sound of his voice.

Then, when I thought of his return, I thought as well of him. The sudden picture of his face came straight into my eyes. I heard his voice. I heard his laughter. My God! thought I, what hopelessness to wait for such a man as that! Surely she knew the worthless kind he was? No, it was more likely she did not. So few, few women do.

"But what law of God or Nature is it," said I to myself, "that makes men treat women so?" Had there been an answer which left one shred of dignity to my back, I might have made it. So far as I could see there was none. "Unless," I thought, "unless it is she asks no better of us and gets but little more."

The words had scarcely entered my mind when I was contradicted flatly to my face. From a doorway as I passed I heard a woman's voice.

"Here, I say."

I stopped, peering into the shadow. A girl was there, sheltering beneath the overhanging portal of the door.

"What is it?" I asked.

Perhaps the tone of genuine inquiry in my voice, no doubt a thousand other things as well, checked her in what she was going to say, for she caught the words and shut her lips upon them.

"What is it?" I asked again.

She screwed up her face into a smile; no doubt to hide the injured dignity in her heart.

"Would you like to give me my cab fare home?" said she.

Now had I received a blow of her hand across my face I should not have felt more surprise. It was so direct an answer to my assumption, to the very question I had put myself but a few steps back. I had assumed that women received the worst from us because they asked no better. Yet what better can a woman ask of any man than charity?

In some awkward effort to explain I have said that life has never reached me—no woman has ever come to me in trouble. But it is more than that—and it is less. I have often wanted a woman to say to me, "Come and buy me a hat." No woman ever has. I have known women whom I would like to have adorned from the top of their dainty heads to the soles of their elegant feet; but either it is that they have husbands who do it for them or there is some ridiculous etiquette which forbids it. It seems I am one of those men of whom a woman asks nothing, another symptom of the disease which I forgot to tell my doctor.

You may imagine, then, what I felt when this girl came out of nowhere and asked me to pay her cab fare home. My hand went straight to my pocket. She might have asked so many things other than that. She might have asked for a new hat. Her own was sodden with rain.

"Well, what is the cab fare?" said I. "Where do you live?"

I said it all in the voice of one who is in two ways

about what he is doing. You see, I had to make something to my credit out of the business. She had asked for so very little. Even when she told me it was Bloomsbury way, I felt a sense of disappointment. It might as well have been Highgate or Clapham Junction. But in this world, whether or not it be true that you want little, little it is most surely that you get. How long you get it for is another matter. It did not interest me then.

I looked up and down the street.

"You won't find the fare so difficult to get as the cab," said I. The whole street was empty. She peered out of the shadow, and I could see she must be wet to the skin.

"Look here," I continued, "come under this umbrella. I live just here. You'd better sit indoors while I get them to whistle for a 'taxi.'"

She stood quite still for a moment and stared at me. A foolish thing to do. Women behave ridiculously at times. It was the only obvious thing to suggest, and yet she gazed at me as though I could not possibly be aware of what I was saying. I was aware.

"Be good enough to come under this umbrella," I repeated, severely. Then she obeyed.

As we walked along in silence to my door, I began to see myself that there were two aspects to the case. I had forgotten for the moment my man. He would be waiting up for me. He always does. There are little things, and Moxon knows how to do them. I have come to believe he likes it. But would he like this?

"Oh, Moxon be damned," said I, and, of course, I must have said it out loud, for she asked me sympathetically who Moxon was.

"He looks after me," I replied.

I think that must have almost confirmed the opinion in her that I was not quite sane; that Moxon, indeed, was my keeper, for she drew away a little till I laughed and explained.

"You're a swell, then?" she said. She said it with conviction. She said it as a question too.

"If you'll tell me what you mean by that," said I, "I'll tell you if you're right."

Whereupon for a few moments she was silent, but when I prompted her for an answer, she said,

"A swell's a swell."

"Then certainly the description doesn't apply to me," I replied, and, taking out the latchkey, I opened my door.

At first she hesitated to come in, but I took her arm. The sleeve of her dress was drenched.

"You mustn't stay outside," said I. "Just come and wait in my sitting-room while Moxon gets a 'taxi.' He won't be long."

The moment I opened the door, there, sure enough, was Dandy to his feet, but at the sight of my visitor he arrested all motion and glared. At this time of night I was his personal belonging. He had me to himself. There was no doubt he resented this intrusion of another person, and when he realised it was a woman, his contempt was wonderful. With just a

glance at me, he turned round and stared into the fire. I never saw reproach so clearly drawn in the outline of a dog's back before.

"This is just a foretaste," thought I, "of what we shall get from Moxon," and I rang the bell.

When I turned round, she was looking all about the room with a silent wonder in her eyes. It is comfortable, I know. I have been told that. But no one has ever surveyed it with such an expression in their eyes as she had then. I felt almost ashamed of myself for calling it my own; for in that look I seemed to see all the dull, cheap finery of her own squalid little rooms in Bloomsbury.

"The world is hard on women," I said to myself, and again the name of Clarissa came like an echo into my thoughts. Clarissa in her little gown of canary-coloured satin.

I was just going to ask her more about herself when she forestalled me.

"Do you live here alone?" she asked.

I nodded my head.

"All this to yourself?"

I nodded again.

"Aren't you lonely?"

I felt quite grateful for Moxon's entrance. He opened the door, and the look of astonishment that leapt into his face was ludicrous to behold.

"I beg pardon, sir," he said quickly.

"I rang," said I. "I want you to whistle for a 'taxi' for this lady. She's been caught in the rain outside."

He went out obediently, closing the door. Another moment and we heard his whistle blowing violently in the street.

"Is that Moxon?" she asked, when he had gone.

"It is."

"What's he think of you bringing me in here?"

"I shouldn't attempt to say," said I. "Moxon's mind is one of the riddles I shall never solve. Sometimes I feel inclined to believe that he never thinks at all."

She sat silent for a moment or two staring at the fire, and then suddenly looked up quickly at me.

"Why did you bring me in here?" she asked.

It came to my lips to give some irrelevant answer. Why should I [illegible] her? Would she understand it if I did? But there flashed across my mind the belief I always hold that above all creatures women are gifted with understanding, and I told her of the story I had just heard.

"And what's that to do with me?" she asked.

"Nothing," I replied, "and everything. One woman in trouble is the whole world of women in distress. What I have to complain of is that they never come to me. You did. That's why I brought you in here. If this child in Ireland were to appeal to me——"

"How can she?"

"That's true," said I, "she doesn't know me."

She looked at me queerly—deedily is the word—

and, almost in a whisper, she asked, "Why don't you go to her?"

I leant back in my chair and laughed.

"What, become a Don Quixote!" said I. "Go out and tilt at windmills, try to pose knight-errant to a child who's lost her heart to someone else! What's the good of saving any woman from her own infatuation? She'll only hate you for it."

She looked me strangely in the face.

"She'll thank you for it one day," she said, and there were whole years of terror in her voice.

Suddenly, then, I saw things different, and at that moment came Moxon into the room.

"The 'taxi' for the lady," said he.

CHAPTER IV

Not only has Moxon his ideas about me; he has also his ideas about women.

"They're a strange lot of people," he said once to me, meaning women, but as if they were all huddled together in waiting down in the hall.

"By which you mean?" said I.

"By which I mean, sir, that my sister Amy has thrown off the man she was engaged to and has taken to religion."

That was not telling me much what he meant. I doubt if he really knew himself. In all probability it was that he had come violently to the conclusion that he knew nothing whatever about them, in which case a man will speak knowingly of women in non-committal terms.

In the same diplomatic way, I knew he must be thinking a great deal with every blast of that whistle out in the street, and doubtless in the same diplomatic way, he would express it later.

I returned therefore with a certain amount of expectancy to my room as soon as the "taxi" had driven off and that poor little creature had vanished away into the grey heart of her world in Bloomsbury.

There was that which I had slipped into her purse which might pay for the fare and perhaps a hat as well. God knows what hats cost, for I do not. Wherefore, when I put my hand into my pocket, I left it to God to suggest the amount.

And then, as I say, I returned, with a deal of expectancy in my mind. Moxon was putting out my slippers with Dandy looking on—Dandy assuring him, with expressions of contempt for his intelligence, that it was not a bit of good.

"There's someone with him," sniffed Dandy. "We shall have to sit up till they go," and he looked back again into the fire.

I remained there for a moment watching him, really waiting to hear what Moxon had to say. He stood up then, and as he said it, upon my soul, I came to the conclusion that I had never had such respect for diplomacy before.

"Is there anything more, sir?" he asked, and had there been a conscience to prick me, I swear to Heaven I should have begged his pardon for having asked so much. As it was, I smiled serenely when I looked back into his face.

"No—I think that's enough," said I.

And when he replied, "Yes, sir," it was intended to convey that he entirely agreed with me.

I let him get to the door and there he stopped, looking round the room once more, to see if I had forgotten anything on my own account; then as he was departing, I called him back. It might have been enough

for him; it was a gross misrepresentation to say that it was enough for me.

"Do you mean to say, Moxon," I began, "that you wouldn't help a woman if she was in trouble?"

"I was not aware, sir," he replied, "that I had said anything about any woman."

I had to swallow that as best I could and begin again on a fresh score.

"Well," I continued, "if a woman had asked you to give her her cab fare home—a woman drenched to the skin, sheltering in a doorway, shivering in the cold at one o'clock at night—what would you do?"

"Naturally—if you put it that way, sir—but it's against my principles, and, what's more, I'm never out at one o'clock at night, I make a point of being in by half-past eleven."

This was too evasive for me. So far as his principles are concerned, I know all about them. A man who supports his mother and two sisters out of his earnings has every right to talk about it being against his principles to help a woman in distress; but there is no special call upon one to believe him. I fancy myself that when, in a moment of confidence, Moxon told me that women as a rule do not take to him, it is that he wishes to hide his affection for the whole sex. I quite agree with him. If I had any affection for the sex, I should try to hide it myself.

But all this was really beside the point. One thing, and one thing only, was in full occupation of my mind—the last words that little half-drowned

mouse had said to me before she went. "She'll thank you for it one day."

A vision of Clarissa thanking me grew formlessly into my mind. I gazed over Dandy's head into the fire. She was there. There was her little gown of canary-coloured satin, the very shade of it, leaping and dancing with all the joy that I had brought. A very silly dream! I tried to put it out of my head. I turned to Moxon, asking him if ever in the course of our travels we had been to Ballysheen. He shook his head.

"Where is it, sir?"

"In Ireland."

He shook his head again.

"Why does it sound familiar to me then?" I asked.

He assumed the attitude of a Prime Minister in deep thought. I cannot say that I know what that attitude is; but it was the attitude I fancy I should assume if I were asked to play the part of a Prime Minister in an advertising world. It impressed me immensely. I felt that his mind was working at a Herculean task. It lasted a good two minutes. Dandy and I watched him with keen interest all the time. So much were we wrought up to the pitch in fact, that when it was all over and Moxon suddenly made a swift movement towards my desk, Dandy rushed at him, barking loudly. It says much for the histrionic powers of Moxon. I could have made some similar exhibition of emotion myself, but I am more reserved.

After a few moments' hunting about among my correspondence—letters I have kept over two or three years which I need to refer to again—he produced an envelope and, in a triumph of silence, gave it into my hands.

I opened it. Then, when I saw the address stamped on the top of the note-paper, it all came back to me. The Rosary—Ballysheen.

"Why, Townshend!" said I.

Moxon inclined his head with dignity, like a conjuror who has produced the card from the hair of a lady in the audience.

"MY DEAR A. H.," ran the letter, "The floods are all over and all our pools are stocked. We shall have the best season we've ever had. There's a rod tired of hanging here for you. Come and flog the water for a week—only come at once. Yours—F. H. TOWNSHEND."

"That was the 18th of April—two years ago," said I.

"You didn't go, sir."

Of course I had not gone. Should I have forgotten Ballysheen if I had? That was the time we went to Algiers, and I glanced at Dandy.

"You can go to bed, Moxon," said I, and therewith I sat down at my desk and pulled out a clean sheet of note-paper.

"Good-night, sir."

"Good-night," I answered, and I dipped my pen in the ink.

"My dear F. H.," I wrote, "If the fishing is anything like it was two years ago, may I come over and hold a rod in your honour? My doctor tells me I want a change and I am beginning to believe him, accordingly when I happened on your letter of two years ago, I made up my mind to force your hospitality. If inconvenient don't hesitate to say so.—Yours, A. H. Bellairs. P.S.—Are there two old maiden ladies in Ballysheen of the name of Fennell?"

When I had finished, I read it through. Could any man guess from that innocent little postscript, the mad errand I had in contemplation? I think I know now why women are such past-masters in the use of that particular form of letter writing. As a method of diplomacy, there is nothing to touch it. What you say in a postscript can have no possible significance to the man who reads it. Were it a matter of dignity alone, no one would admit to themselves that you had treated them with such scant courtesy. No—that postscript was the one bright spot in my letter, and therewith I sealed it up.

When I came back to the fire, there was Dandy still staring at the leaping antics of the canary-coloured flame. I sat down on the hearthrug and put one arm round his neck.

"You can see that satin gown, too, can you?" said I. Dandy blinked his eyes. "And do you think she'll be grateful?" I went on. "Do you really imagine that any woman is grateful to a rank outsider for breaking her heart? It will break her heart,

you know. She's breaking it now, longing for her blue skies and her palm trees—but if we send her back there without him, it'll break her heart altogether. Yet that's what we shall have to do. We shall have to send her back again. What do you think about it all?"

Dandy yawned towards the fire, and the yellow flame danced higher than ever. At moments it looked as though it were going to leap up the chimney out of sight, yet always it came back into the heart of the fire once more like a spirit chained to the furnace.

Three days later there came a reply from Ballysheen.

"There's not a fish in the water," wrote Townshend. "But come all the same, you never know. Your company is as good as any twenty-pounder in the slackest of seasons." "What, is he lonely too?" I thought. "There are Miss Fennells here," the letter continued, "but for God's sake don't talk of them as maiden ladies—Miss Emily wears an orange-coloured wig, so they say in Ballysheen—and she would have you know that at thirty-seven a woman is in her prime. I don't promise you entertainment from them—but come anyway."

And I am going. I have just rung the bell for Moxon, and Dandy already is beginning to lift his nose to the scent of adventure in the wind.

CHAPTER V

WHEN I woke up this morning—my first in Ballysheen—the sun was ablaze upon everything. Last evening I had driven over the nine miles from Youghal upon Quin's car. Quin is the local baker, doing odd jobs as a jobbing-master besides. Then the sky had been a sullen grey, no light or hope was there to be found in it as far as your eyes could see. Those long, lone, rutted roads were empty. Not a soul did we pass from the bridge over the Blackwater all the way to where the dense trees tunnel an entrance into the wee village of Ballysheen.

"Is it always as lonely as this over here?" I asked of Quin, whose eyes were set dreamily before him, as though in the little gap between the horse's ears he saw visions of a country we should never reach. "Are there never any people about on the roads?"

With a jerk he brought himself back into the present.

"Shure there are plenty of people in these parts," said he, "only they're in their cottages, the way 'tis misting."

I gathered that he meant raining. But it was not raining, wherefore I said as much.

"Ah—well it will," said he, in a tone of fatality. "Ye see them clouds over there to the west, 'tis always wet when they be coming up from there. D'ye see the way the cattle have got their backs turned to ut? Yirra, don't I know a wet day when I see wan!"

"But, my God!" said I. "It's six o'clock and it isn't wet yet!"

"Wait a while," he replied, equably, "it will," and he put up the collar of his coat to prove it.

That was my first, my very first, impression of Ireland. Here this morning there was not a cloud in the sky, the sun was a flaming torch in the heavens, there had not been a drop of rain all night, yet in the heart, in the very spirit of James Quin there had poured down a veritable deluge. And they would understand Ireland who talk of a nation of light-hearted men and women. I think we must have driven three more miles of our journey before I said another word after that. Speaking truth, the greyness of it, the endlessness of those walls of mud and stone, the passing sight of a roofless cottage, the very soul of its past habitation starved and dead within it, they had all combined to close about me in a dull, impenetrable despair. Despair, I will admit, that was not of my own. I was thinking of Clarissa. I could see her gazing forth from the window of her prison, with those dark, Southern eyes of hers, gazing into that limitless mist of grey out of which, had a Banshee cried, upon my word, I should have felt no surprise.

Then from thought of her came the sudden wonder to my mind—how was I to help her? How, in the name of Heaven, set about the liberation of a woman who hugs to her heart the very chains that bind her? And not that obstacle only, but there were those two maiden aunts to face. It was then I turned once more to Quin.

"Who are the Miss Fennells who live in Ballysheen?" I asked.

"Is it Miss Mary and her sister, living at Janemount?"

"Are there others?" I inquired.

"There are not," said he, "'tis enough for one village to be havin' thim two. I wouldn't drive thim on this carr, not if they was to go down on their four knees bended."

"Why not?"

"Faith, they'd owe me for the job of ut for the rest of their lives."

"Are they very poor?"

"Is ut poor?" he exclaimed. "Shure, they haven't got what 'ud cover the palm of me wan hand with silver, an' they dhrive to Lady O'Shea's at the house on the cliff over, the way ye'd think the money was dhropping out av a sack with a hole in ut."

"Is it a crime to be poor, then?" I asked.

"It is not," said he; "but 'tis a crime to hide ut, the way ye can be ashamed of others who are."

To meet fatalism and philosophy all in one day! I had not done as much in London in a year. But

in Ireland, if Nature has not given you the one, a divine Providence invests you with the other. My friend Townshend, whom I have not met since our days together at Oxford, I find is a philosopher to his finger-tips. But his is a philosophy of the beauty of Nature, whereby he closes Her hand that she may not present him with the gift of fatalism too.

It was this morning when, finding the sun laughing in at my windows, shaming my laziness, I jumped out of bed, dressed and went down into the garden. There was Townshend already before me, visiting his rose trees with an open pruning knife in his hand.

"I thought March——" I began.

He laughed.

"You're quite right," said he. "March for pruning—but all the rest of the year for love."

I stole a glance at him as he moved to another tree. This was the first swift insight I had received into his philosophy. Had he really got the secret of it—had he found Dandy's unassailable circle of contentment? One asks one's self these questions in a breath. If in the next breath they are not answered, they are gone. Now, in the next breath, the name of Dandy having but recently come into my mind, I lost sight of the spirit of his philosophy and began wondering where he was in the flesh. From wondering, I asked.

"On a morning like this," said Townshend, "where else would you expect?"

I shook my head.

"Out on the cliffs with Bellwattle?"

I stared at him.

"In the name of God," said I, "who's that?"

"My wife. My name for her is Bellwattle. In a moment of exuberant spirits one day, she addressed me as Cruikshank. Why? For no reason. For less reason I returned her the compliment of Bellwattle. That at least was suggested by her name for me. What made her think of Cruikshank is more than I can tell you. She hasn't the faintest conception herself."

So I call them Cruikshank and Bellwattle. It seems in some odd way to fit in with the quaintness of their philosophy—this living to give to Nature in return for what Nature has to bestow on them.

Just before breakfast, then, came Dandy dancing attendance on Bellwattle. They had walked four miles.

She swung up the path from the gate with Dandy at her heels, and her step was as light as the morning. I had not even known until the night before that my host was married; yet as Dandy, seeing me for the first time that day, leapt thrice and was at my knees, she gave me a smile and a cry of good-morrow, and I felt we had been the best of friends for the better part of our lives.

"How about breakfast?" said Cruikshank.

Bellwattle nodded her head violently, waving a bunch of wild violets in her hand. I followed them slowly into the house. There was something on

Dandy's mind which he had somehow or other to express.

"Well—what is it?" I said, and I caught one paw as he jumped up, so that he must walk upon his hind legs beside me. "What is it?"

He dragged at his paw until I set it free, and then he told me. He raced three times round one flower-bed and twice round another, with the sides of his body almost touching the ground, so incredible was the speed he made. When that was completed he came back and looked up at me with his tongue lolling out.

"I understand," said I. "I can feel it just the same. It's the country." Whereupon he started racing it all over again.

Of course, it is the moment that lives; never the hour or the day or the year. The moment is the nearest approach to the truth in our conception of Eternity. I have gone back in my mind since, over my stay at Ballysheen, and, though many a meal-time comes back to my memory with pleasure, that first breakfast stands out beyond them all.

The chintz curtains were drawn full back, the window was wide open. Marvellously muted by the distance came the tireless music of the sea, which plays upon its gentlest instruments when the day is still. From the farmyard over the way the strains of yet another orchestra touched at moments on our ears. Neither the one nor the other clashed, for Nature chooses her instrumentalists, not for what they *can* do, but for what they *must*. This is not

only the secret of harmony, it is the secret of all music and all art.

In the hedge of barb.ry across the lawn, the birds were building a very city of houses. In the high grass of the lawn itself, the daffodils lifted their trumpets, blowing a blast—young heralds announcing the entry of a knight into the lists, while all the little snowdrops bowed their heads, as maidens used, and trembled.

I sat down at the table facing the window in silence. Upon the clean white cloth was placed their set of Worcester-pink, with the colour of roses, such as we scarce know how to handle upon china now. In the middle of it all stood one great bowl of primroses.

The maid came in and placed a basin of porridge before me—porridge! Such as I had not eaten for years and years.

"I'll ask them to let me off this to-morrow," I said to myself. "But this being my first day, 'twere better manners to take it now and say nothing." Therefore, I took it; and what is more, I am glad I said nothing. When I looked up out of the window again, that basin was empty.

Half way through breakfast, Cruikshank suddenly looked up. He directed his gaze at me.

"What was that about the Miss Fennells?" said he.

For a moment I felt confusion in my cheeks. The barest instant it lasted, and then was gone; yet in that very instant Bellwattle's eyes had sought my face. When a woman has instinct—and when has she not?

—her heart has seen long before her eyes are warned of it. The abruptness of her husband's question had presupposed confusion in both of us, wherefore, while I was confused, her eyes were ready to my face to find it. I would swear Cruikshank were as ignorant of it as a helpless babe, for when he had waited but a second for my answer, he began again.

"That letter you wrote me," said he. "When you asked——"

"Of course—I know—and in the postscript I wanted to know if they lived here."

"That's it."

I made an effort to let him leave it at that.

"All your eggs come from the farm, I suppose?" I hazarded.

"Yes; he won't let me keep chickens; they tear up the garden," said Bellwattle. "Bless their hearts—I think those little chickens—the tiny little yellow things——" The thought of them overwhelmed her.

Words failed, as they often did with her. She begged to be allowed to keep them next year; but Cruikshank shook his head.

"What was it you wanted to find out about the Miss Fennells?" he asked. His mind had clung tenaciously to its subject.

"Merely that I wanted to know if they lived here. I had heard them mentioned."

"They live at a house called Janemount," said Bellwattle. "I'll show it to you after breakfast."

CHAPTER VI

In an affair of this kind it is best to keep one's own counsel. I find it necessary to warn myself in this fashion, for it has ever been that women have found an easy prey in me. I know, moreover, that Bellwattle is already curious of my confusion at breakfast. What she thinks it would be impossible to say; but that she has finally made up her mind about it, of that I am certain. Such a child of Nature as she is must have instinct alive in her to her finger-tips.

Doubtless, she imagines I am in love. Without the shadow of a doubt, she believes a woman to be in some way concerned. For here it is that women think more elementally, more simply and, therefore, nearer to the truth than their brothers. There is nothing that a lonely man can do, but what a woman will trace therein the influence of her sex. And it is damnable to have to admit it, but she is right.

Now with Cruikshank, whose mind is for ever working in complicated theories about the grafting of roses and who, in his day at Oxford, was thought well of as a mathematician, with him and his highly elaborated intelligence, I know that I could trust myself all day. I might lead him a thousand times in the direction of

Clarissa's prison, and he would never adjust the facts to a definite assumption of my behaviour. It would not be so with Bellwattle.

As I left them after breakfast in the morning-room, Cruikshank said to me, "You know, I'm glad you thought of coming over for the fishing. From something I heard yesterday I believe we're going to have some fish up the stream after all."

I echoed most heartily that I was glad of it, and I left the room. But outside the door I stopped. There was a broad passage leading down to the hall door which stood wide open, and through a break in the trees, where stretched in the distance a sea of emerald, there stood the blood brown sail of a Kerry fishing-boat. I stopped to watch it, flapping its wings in an idle breeze like a tortoise-shell butterfly in a green meadow. Then, as I suppose, thinking I had departed altogether, I heard Bellwattle's voice within the room.

"I like him very much," said she, for which silently I thanked her from the bottom of my heart. "But," she added, "what a pity he's so ugly."

Now, if there be those who do not follow from this how I knew that she had connected me at once in her mind with the mystery of some woman, I must leave it unexplained for the benefit of those who do. To give it words were to tangle it a thousand times. It is far too dainty for that.

I walked on then out into the garden, wandering up this path, down that. Everywhere there were those little sticks, neatly written on, marking the spots where

seeds were in the earth. I picked up one and read it—"Sweet Pea—Lady Grizel Hamilton"—and all about that spot there was a cluster of little Lady Grizels, neat and clean in their tiny fresh green pinafores. Next door—for all the world like boys and girls at a country National school—stood a crowd of sturdy, young Lord Nelsons. Upon my soul I should not have known which was which had it not been for the kindly information of those little slips of wood directing me.

And then it suddenly occurred to me how strange it was, how dearly does all humanity cling to life; for whereas in God's Acre the little slips of wood mark out the places where the dead lie buried, it is not so with man. In that little acre which, with such simple vanity, he calls his own, his garden, a man will plant his tiny slips of wood to mark the spot where life is hidden for a while; hidden, only to come forth and blossom for his happiness. When, then, I had thought so far as that, there came with a rush into my mind the words in Maeterlinck's "Blue Bird," "There are no dead," and suddenly I saw it all.

The body of a man holds a seed. Through life it ripens, as all seeds do. Then, when the sun has parched it dry and you would say "there is no life in it"; then comes the hand of God to lay it in the earth once more that it may flower again.

In a strange, weird picture, then, I saw a vision of the Lady Grizel Hamilton planting a seed of the sweet pea of her name. With gentle, loving fingers she laid it in

her garden's acre, and in the warm brown mould she placed a slip of wood, washed white with lime, on which she wrote—"The Lady Grizel Hamilton."

That vision passed, and then I saw the hand of God stretch forth and take the gentle lady in His grasp. With fingers just as tender, He laid her in a corner of His acre and, whitening a little cross of stone, He wrote —"The Lady Grizel Hamilton."

"Can it be that there is philosophy in the very air of this country?" thought I to myself, and then, before the fancy of it vanished quite away, I said the name again. I must have said it aloud. "The Lady Grizel Hamilton," said I, and looking up, I saw Cruikshank on the other side of the bed smiling at me.

"Picking out the best?" said he. "The Lady Grizel is a wonderful pale mauve."

"Are these little mites of things going to bear a mauve flower?"

"Are they going to bear baskets full of them?" he said. "Baskets and baskets full! Wait till you see them when they're standing as high as my arm can reach."

"You're boasting," said I.

"I'm not, on my oath. I stand six foot, and they come high above my head. In these beds here, with this aspect, I can grow the best sweet peas in the South of Ireland."

"Go on," said I, "I like to hear it. No man's a gardener until he can say his garden is the best. It's

the colossal and superb self-satisfaction of the creation all over again. You find it all good. And they would say man was not made in God's image! What colour does Lord Nelson wear?"

"A faint blue."

"Good—and Black Knight?"

"Oh, a most wonderful deep black scarlet."

"Out of that little tuft of green!"

I looked up and found his eyes were watching me.

"Why do you ask?" he said. "You're not a gardener."

I agreed I was not.

"I want to get at your philosophy," said I.

"I'm not a philosopher," he replied; "I'm a gardener."

"But what do you get out of it?"

He pointed down to the little Lady Grizels in their green pinafores.

"Nothing else?"

He took out a pocket-knife and cut a little twig from a standard rose tree, cut it off just above a tiny red shoot that was thrusting itself forth from the bare, dry wood.

"Preparing a garden," said he, "is like laying the foundations of a perfect city. Every path is a street, every bush is a dwelling-place, every flower is a beautiful being. Sometimes it seems like that. And sometimes it seems like an adventure of Sindbad the Sailor, an engrossing business of dealing with the earth for the treasures she holds. You don't know what colours

there are in that dull brown mould until you come to drop into it a little withered seed the size of a pin's head, a magnet, drawing out of the ground colours that no artist would have the courage to mix upon his palette. A little while ago I pruned the rose trees of the front of the house. It was a blazing hot day. I had to get a ladder and lean it up against the wall. When I climbed up the ladder there was a warm breath of air, coming from the bricks, and when I stretched out, leaning right up against it, seeing all those young shoots of the rose tree just bursting with life, it was like leaning up against the world and knowing that the whole scheme of things was perfect."

He had still more to say. I could see that the whole heart of him was full of it, but suddenly he stopped in confusion.

"What did you make me talk like that for?" he asked.

"Just for what I wanted to know," said I. "Your philosophy. It proves what I always believe."

"What's that?"

"Philosophy's not a matter of expediency. You don't evolve a philosophy to help you through life; life evolves it for you, and the only philosophy that counts is one of beauty. But there's something more beautiful than sweet peas."

"I quite agree," said Cruikshank. "I much prefer lilies myself."

"I was thinking of human beings," said I, and at that moment came Bellwattle out of the house.

"Now," I asked her, "what's the most beautiful thing in the world?"

She heard not a single word of my question, but she answered it nevertheless.

"Where's Dandy?" said she.

Upon my soul, I don't know which of us is right.

CHAPTER VII

BALLYSHEEN is one of those little villages, tucked in between high headlands, that lie along the south coast of Ireland. A Protestant rector, a parish priest and his curate shepherd the two or three hundred souls of which it is composed.

There is one street—so called—lined with those white or pink-washed cottages, all one storey in height, which are peculiar to that corner of the world. For the most part they are occupied by fishermen; though here, there is Quin the baker, there, Foley the provision merchant and, distributed in other cottages down the street, you will find Linehan the cobbler, Tierney the town councillor and plumber, O'Shaughnessey the butcher, and last of all, achieving distinction by its proportions, the two-storied edifice belonging to the Royal Irish Constabulary.

Besides and beyond the centre of this hive of activity, there are three lanes, all combining to meet towards that road which has been built up the side of the cliff and which, when at length necessity ceases for it to continue, dwindles into a winding cliff path that leads on and away to the wild headlands.

The few better class houses, occupied by summer residents, or those who of necessity are compelled to

live there the whole year round, are to be found variously situated. There is no fashionable quarter in Ballysheen. If you were to divide it up into quarters you might lose sight of it altogether. My friend Cruikshank lives in a house hidden away in a nest of trees that cluster round the Protestant church. Janemount, on the other hand, belonging to the Miss Fennells, is away on the very brow of the cliff road, just at that point where it tires of magnificence and becomes a little rambling path.

Apart then from the cottages and houses of better class, there are the Roman Catholic chapel, the Protestant church, the schools, the post-office—which is an ordinary cottage with two holes in it, one where you buy stamps, the other where you post letters—there is the lifeboat house and the court house, the latter used mostly by the butcher, and last of all, there is that record of forty years' stern and persistent agitation, the pier. Like a breakwater, it runs out some thirty yards or so into the sea, locking in a little strip of water where the fishing-boats lie at rest. For forty years they agitated for its construction and when, after a year's labour, the last block of cement was laid, the fishermen turned and looked into each other's faces.

"Shure, what in the name of God do we want a pier for?" they said. "If they'd had the sinse to buy us a few boats!"

But no one yet who has provided for Ireland has ever had the "sinse." Sense in fact is not the quality that is required. One ounce of heart would do more

for Ireland than a whole bushel load of sense. And the one man who had it, lost it to a woman! Is not that ever the way?

This then is Ballysheen. I feel I have discharged a duty in describing it, however poorly. In the first ten minutes as I walked with Bellwattle towards the Miss Fennells' houses, I was able to absorb it all, to realise at the same time that I knew nothing whatever about it.

It is ever the people one must know; seldom the place. I made the acquaintance of three of them that morning. It was as we took the broad lane which connects the church road with that leading to the cliff, that we saw the figure of a man approaching us. At such distance he would have been undistinguishable to me, but Bellwattle knew him at once.

"Let's turn and go the other way through the village," said she.

I asked her why.

"Here comes General Ffrench. He's a most terrible bore. Directly he sees I'm with a visitor—a stranger—he'll want to be introduced. He'll force us to stop and speak to him."

"As you like," said I, but I was disappointed. I was not sure that anybody could bore me there. "What sort of a dog is that he has with him?" I added. It was a hazard, but it was my only chance.

"Is Pepper with him?" said she.

"If that black Aberdeen is Pepper—" said I.

I heard no more about turning back. She just told

me to come along and I went. As we decreased the distance between us, Dandy began a-pricking of his ears.

I pointed to him as his tail set erect.

"I don't expect we shall be bored," said I.

She stooped down to take hold of Dandy's collar.

"P'raps they'll fight."

I shook my head. This was the first I was to see of Bellwattle in her moments of maternal fussiness. Where any animals, birds or insects are concerned, she becomes like a hen with a brood of chickens. Cruikshank tells me that when first he took her abroad, she shuddered and winced at every animal in the streets. Whenever she saw a horse whose harness chafed a sore on its back, she bit her lip and clutched his arm.

"You mustn't look at them," said he.

"I can't help it," she replied. "I find myself looking out for them because I know they're there."

At last he gave it up in despair. There was no curing her.

"I suppose women must suffer," he concluded, as he told the little incident to me.

"If one might only say that of men," said I.

"And who is this General Ffrench?" I asked, as we walked along to meet him. "What regiments did he command?"

"Oh—he was only a Surgeon-General," said she.

"Then why not give him his proper title?"

"Not one of us has the courage, besides you forget the—the what-ever-you-call-it that we get out of it.

It's not only what he calls himself, it's what we want to call him. We should be very unhappy if we couldn't say—General Ffrench."

I bent my head in comprehension, just catching the twinkle in her eye.

"Am I to begin to understand Ireland from that?" I asked.

"I wouldn't begin, if I were you," said she.

And then she told me more about him, how he lived with his widowed sister, combining his pension with the fragile income her husband had left to her; how she, too, cultivated a garden, but one whose produce was designed to bring them in a steady, but scarce-appreciable profit through the summer months.

"She sends round a little girl," said Bellwattle, "who has a bunch of flowers in one hand which she holds—conscupiously do you call it?"

I nodded—what does a word matter one way or another? Language was a precious thing once when the few knew how to use it.

"Which she holds conscupiously in front of her. In the other, behind her back, she carries a basket of vegetables, peas and so on. She comes to the back door and when it is opened, she thrusts forward the flowers. 'These are from Mrs. Quigley,' she says, and then comes the hand with the basket of peas from behind her back."

"Therefore having taken the flowers," said I——

"Well naturally," said Bellwattle; "I wouldn't mind if I had to praise her for her peas, because they're

really splendid. But one dare not mention them. They've been paid for. So I have to thank her for the flowers which are given, and they're nothing to what Cruikshank grows."

"Cruikshank grows the most beautiful flowers in the world," said I.

She looked at me out of the corner of one eye, which is her habit, always fearing that one has contrived to deceive her. If ever she finds that I have misled her in the use of that word—conspicuously—can I hope to regain her confidence then? But were women unable to forgive, where should we be? And not that only, but what would there be left for women to do?

The next moment, General Ffrench was bearing down upon us. Already he had raised his hat, in much the same fashion as you lift a lid from off a saucepan and, holding it there above his head, he came forward with the other hand stretched out and a weather eye upon me. Bellwattle knew her man. There was no getting away from this.

But, the moment I was introduced, she turned her attentions to Pepper. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw her formally introducing Dandy.

"Pepper," I heard her say, "this is Dandy," and they both glared at each other like two nations at war.

"You'd find this a quiet little spot," the General was saying to me, "a bit too quiet—eh—after London." It sounded to me like comparing Chicago to an oasis in the desert. "I find myself," he went on, "that it's too quiet sometimes—just a bit too quiet. I like the

hum of the traffic—the hum—eh—that's what it was like when I was in London thirty years ago—sounded just like a hum."

"It has been called that," said I.

"It has? Well—I'm not surprised. I go to Dublin myself occasionally—just to see how the world's wagging. It's a change after this. I always say to my sister, Mrs. Quigley—you must come down and see us—I always say to her that the danger of a place like this is that you get in a groove. Fatal thing, you know—fatal thing—a groove."

"I don't think you need fear that," said I, "if you go to Dublin every year."

"Well, I don't go every year, not regularly; it's an expensive place you know—Dublin—there are such a crowd of things to be seen, such a number of things to be done, and they all cost money. I was up there the time the old Queen came over—fine reception we gave her too—fine reception. I remember it as if it were yesterday."

At this point he suddenly assumed that terrible attitude of the raconteur. I felt Bellwattle's hand tugging gently at my coat.

"I beg your pardon, General Ffrench," said I, and then I turned to her. "Are we keeping you?" I asked.

"I think I'd better be getting on," said she.

"Tell me that another time then, will you?" I suggested. "I've often wanted to know what sort of a reception she really did get."

"Thank you," said Bellwattle, when we had passed out of hearing.

"Thank *you*," said I. "Now tell me, has he ever been to Dublin since he gave the old Queen that magnificent reception?"

"Never."

I looked back at his retreating figure. He was striding it nobly. There was the whole of the British Army in every step that he took. He seemed as though he were marching, for ever marching, as if he feared were he to stop, the music would no longer sound in his ears. Every action, therefore, every movement had in them the rigid discipline of the Service. Each simple thing he did was in time to the upward wave of the drum-stick. He then was one of the three I met that morning.

The other two were the Miss Fennells, the two maiden aunts whose existence I had first heard of in that far-away restaurant which seems to me now at the furthermost end of the earth.

When Bellwattle touched my arm and said—"The Miss Fennells"—I felt the pulses quicken which evenly had been beating in me. The whole of that story then came back as though I had just heard it. The sound of the violins crept into my ears. I could hear the clatter of plates, see the faces of those two, that man and that woman, as they sat together drinking their coffee. His barking laugh shouted suddenly at me out of the past; but last of all, Clarissa, in her gown of canary-coloured satin.

And then I knew how, until that moment, it had never truly been real. I had dreamed it all until then; it had only been a story. But now these two prim figures, in costumes too extravagant to describe, the mere sight of them had made the story come true, had turned the dream into reality, and I began a-wondering why I had ever set out about the business at all.

I think Bellwattle must have been watching me, for suddenly she said—

"Would you rather we didn't stop and talk to them?"

How do women know these things? She had taken it from my mind before my thoughts had found it. In another instant, had she not spoken, it would have been a conscious idea. I should have preferred not to have been introduced to them that morning. Then she put her question and, human nature being as it is, I said, "Oh no—by all means, let us stop. I want to meet them."

Whereupon in the next moment, there was made the second stage in my erratic journey. I was introduced in all solemnity to Miss Mary and Miss Teresa Fennell.

It is a distressing fact, when you come to describe a woman, to find that you know nothing whatever of the character of those garments which go to make her what she is. A hat or a bonnet mean but little—but little, unless you can trim them. The bonnet then which was worn by Miss Mary, the hat by Miss Teresa, must remain without description, for to trim them is abso-

lutely beyond me. I can only tell of the little thought that occurred to my mind as I noticed them—the thought that the bonnet of Miss Mary was a gentle concession of years to the hat of Miss Teresa. There is hope left in a hat, even if it only exists in the mind of the head that wears it. God alone can tell what hopes lie buried beneath a bonnet; no man, I swear, could ever know.

The Miss Fennells, therefore, must describe themselves. Miss Teresa with her wealth of ruddy brown hair, her discreet allusions to the age at which a woman is at her best, her pathetic little memories of the past, all of which go to prove that she cannot be more than thirty-seven, notwithstanding these obvious characteristics, Miss Teresa eludes me. Neither can I any the more describe Miss Mary.

It is personal bias that stands in my way. I think of their cruelty to Clarissa, and I can judge them from no other standpoint. It is as well then to leave it alone. Only the far-reaching and all-comprehensive eye can judge. I was prejudiced before I met them.

It was as I listened to Miss Mary, whose words hurry from her lips and remind me, in their simple anxiety to get out of her mouth, of children tumbling out of school, it was as I listened to her that I heard Bellwattle say to Miss Teresa——

"How is your invalid to-day?"

In a moment my hearing was alert, but the langu... reply of Miss Teresa did not satisfy me.

"Much about the same," she answered.

I was not content to let it go at that. With proper sympathy, I inquired of Miss Mary.

"You have an invalid in your house?" said I.

"Poor child—we have indeed," replied she. "'Tis her eyes are very weak."

"Is the doctor attending her?"

"Well—the doctor here is not. She's after seeing a doctor in London and 'tis his instructions now that she's following."

"In what way are her eyes weak?" I asked, and I looked directly in her face.

With no intention to depreciate human nature, I say all men and women are liars, and with one striking difference between. Women are successful. With the utmost ease in the world, Miss Mary told me of this lovely child to whom her nephew was engaged to be married. With the most dexterous imagination she described how Clarissa's ailment compelled her to be confined to the house in semi-darkness. How lovingly they cared for her and tended her—well "it is not difficult for you to suppose," said she.

"It is not," said I. "But surely," I added, "it must be bad for her to have no exercise."

Oh—there were evenings, of course, when they took her out—just for a little walk along the cliffs. Even then they had to protect her eyes. The doctor in London had said she could not stand the light.

"What, light at night?" said I.

Miss Teresa touched Miss Mary's arm.

"Have you got the letters?" she asked. There was

no hurry about it. It was said quite gently; but it served its purpose. My question was never answered. The next moment they were continuing their way to the post-office. Bellwattle and I were left alone to the pursuit of our destination.

"Do you want to see where they live now you've met them?" she asked.

"We might as well go that way," I replied. "It leads to the walk round the cliffs, doesn't it?"

She nodded and we walked on.

I knew the house, long before she stopped and pointed it out to me. It was just the prison, just the cage I had imagined it to be. In a little plot of land on the cliff's edge it stood, looking out across the wide and lonely bay of Ballysheen. The sun was shining then, but I knew what it must be like on a lightless day. There was no garden, and the shrubs that partly surrounded the house were bent with the south-west wind. They looked like old witches stooping in the grass to gather simples. No creeper grew upon the walls. It was all a cold grey stone, and the windows stared and stared as though they ached with endless looking out to sea. Even with that sun burning in the sky, the water was not blue. I thought of the colours which must still be living, burning in the eyes of that little prisoner behind those walls, and with an effort I kept my exclamation to myself.

"Shall we go on?" said Bellwattle.

I acquiesced, but just as we were about to turn away, I saw the curtains in an upper window move. For

one instant they were pulled aside and a face that surprised me with its paleness peeped out.

I stopped, waiting to see more, hoping that I should really behold Clarissa for the first time and then, as the curtains fell together again, I turned to look at Bellwattle and found her watching me.

CHAPTER VIII

At the bottom of the garden, I sat out under the hedge of nut trees this afternoon and did my best to formulate a plan of action. Dandy sat on the ground before me, staring up into my face. He knew I was thinking deeply and, though he would not have disturbed me for the world, I saw that he was offering me his assistance. It consists of a rapt and undivided attention while I speak aloud whatever comes first into my head. There are but few occasions when I refuse his offer. I accepted it then.

"This requires strenuous concentration," said I, whereupon I began to let my eyes wander up the garden to where Cruikshank was seeing to his raspberry canes.

He really should have been called Adam. Cruikshank is no proper name for him. For that matter, she might with better reason have been called Eve. They are just a man and woman in a garden and, so far as I know, there is no tree within its high stone walls, the fruit of which they may not touch. It would have saved a deal of trouble had the garden of Eden been like this.

As I looked back, I caught Dandy's eye. It was reminding me that I was letting concentration go with the wind. That wind always springs up when I

attempt anything in the nature of concentration. I know so well the tune of it. So sure as I set my mind to some definite contemplation, it plays the prettiest of fancies in my ears.

"Well, then," said I, with an effort, "what's to be done? There are a thousand difficulties. First of all, she is never alone, except in that little cage of hers with its drab white muslin curtains. If we meet her on the cliffs at night, there are the Miss Fennells guarding her with their escort. There is no possibility of seeing her in the house. But last of all——" and here I bent down, looking Dandy squarely in the eyes—"what right have we to interfere when the God of a Thousand Circumstances makes up His mind to break a woman's heart?"

Now Dandy knows nothing of the God of a Thousand Circumstances. The only God he honours is that of Chance, wherefore and on that score he answered my question as best he could. There was a sudden rustling in the long grass under the nut trees, whereat he pricked his ears and all his body stiffened to the sound. The next instant a large rat crept out of the bushes, and Dandy was after him. I made no objection. He never catches them. For a few minutes he rushes wildly in many directions, digs up innumerable things that have nothing whatever to do with it, and behaves generally as though life were a whirlwind, of which he is the centre and all-important force. After that, he comes back quietly once more to me, and sitting down says—

"I might have caught him. I got very near. I don't often miss them like that. I was really too clever for him; that's how he got away."

Then a scarlet tongue comes out and he licks his lips. It proves conclusively to me how near he did get. He always does; that is why I raise no objections. It puts him in excellent mood, and, I imagine, has a way of teaching the rat that fitness is a quality never to be despised in this world.

I waited on this occasion till it was quite over. Then Dandy came back and told me all about it, right through, without any variation, even to the licking of the lips.

"So that's your answer," said I. "Have no truck with the God of Circumstance. Follow the God of Chance."

It was the best advice he could have given me. Adventure makes a man of one. I had set forth upon mine and there was no sense in turning back because I had come to a passage at arms with difficulty in the very first stage of the journey. Here was this child, friendless, at the mercy of two gaolers in whose possession were all the bolts of prejudice wherewith to keep her locked away. There was no appealing to the kindlier nature of the two Miss Fennells. There was no telling them the truth of that nephew on whom all their hopes were centred. Then how to prove to this little prisoner that she had a friend waiting outside the walls of her fortress, ready to help her, if she would but accept help, ready to save her from herself and all the

relentless consequences of the step she was about to take. How to prove to her that she had need of a friend at all? Would she believe it? Would she ever take the word of an utter stranger against the promises of the man she loved? Not if I had any knowledge of women at all.

"But plain knowledge never won or lost an adventure yet," said I, and Dandy looked up with a vast amount of appreciation into my face. He entirely agreed with me there. "We must write to her," I went on. "Contrive to meet her one of these nights on the cliffs—give her the letter, make some effort to see her alone and tell her—tell her everything—tell her to go back to her blue skies and her sunshine where she can bury those black grave cloths, the garments of a civilised community, and take out her gown of canary-coloured satin once more."

Having made up our minds to this, we went into the house and began the inditing of a letter to Clarissa. It was at this point that Dandy lost interest. He will give me the full of his attention so long as I talk to him; but it is more than he can stand when I take up a pen and, except for the scratching of it on the paper, sit in silence at my table. The sound of scratching, to begin with, annoys him; then, again, although he has tried, he cannot understand one word of what I write. On these occasions, he wanders aimlessly round the room, coming back at intervals to my chair to try and catch my eye. Failing many times in this, he at last throws himself in despair upon the hearthrug where,

lying with his nose between his two fore-paws, he day-dreams—dreams of past adventures in which he figures as the hero, and I, if indeed I appear in them at all, am just a super on an over-crowded stage. He behaved no differently this morning, except that as I sat down and dipped my pen in the ink, he yawned. He had never done that before. I took no notice. I wrote my letter. Here is what I said :

"CLARISSA,—I know your eyes are not bad. I know all about it. I have seen him in London and I want to tell you something. Can you manage to meet me one evening round the cliffs? Try and think how you can arrange it. I must see you alone."

I did not sign it because I had determined that if it were to be delivered at all, it must be with my own hands. But how? It had all the difficulties attached to it as I remember having experienced when I was a boy at school. At the church where we went every Sunday, there attended also a neighbouring school of girls. It was my fortune that one of them should catch my eye. From Sunday to Sunday those glances continued, till at last they held a smile. She smiled at me. I could hardly believe it to be true. Again I looked and again she smiled. Then I remember how I tore from my hymn-book that page containing the hymn :

> "Can a woman's tender care
> Cease toward the child she bare?
> Yes, she may forgetful be,
> Yet will I remember thee."

And in the fulness of my heart, believing it to convey all

my sentiments far better than I could ever have expressed them myself, I marked the last line deeply with pencil, meaning to give it her at the very first opportunity. But how? I have never found out to this day. Shall I ever find out the way to give this letter to Clarissa?

CHAPTER IX

A LITTLE comedy was played here yesterday, here in the garden—in our garden. I call it ours for, as the days go by in the company of Cruikshank and his Bellwattle, there grows more and more into my mind the belief that theirs is the only way of living. Wherefore, in my vainest imaginings, I share the garden with them, calling it ours to give a flavour of reality to the conceit.

I was not present when this little play was enacted, nor indeed should I have perceived the full comedy of it had I been there. Bellwattle, Dandy and I were away round the first head of the cliffs where the gulls were wheeling, forever wheeling, up against the wind.

Cruikshank told us about it afterwards. He was working, it appears, in the garden—when, indeed, is he not? There is so much for a gardener to be doing at this time of the year; indeed, there is so much for him to be doing that I come to think he is one of the busiest men I know.

"The earth is a bed," Cruikshank said to me once, "that always needs making."

I suppose he is right. The princesses who sleep there till the morning of summer calls them to get up, show

all the tenderness of flesh that betokens a real princess. Their beds must be made every day. One pea beneath innumerable mattresses would bruise their delicate skins. What wonderful employment then, to be master of the bed-chamber, mistress of the robes, comptroller of the household—all rolled into one—and this to princesses whom you believe to be the most beautiful in the world.

Cruikshank, therefore, was making the beds, shaking the coverlet of earth so lightly as never to disturb the sleepers beneath. It was while he was working, he said, that he became aware of the approach of General French. The old gentleman came up the little drive from the gate that opens on to the road. He was walking timidly, as though he knew that at such a time in the morning it were an intrusion to visit one's friends. Much of that military bearing of his was gone. His shoulders were bent and his head thrust forward as he glanced suspiciously about him.

For a while Cruikshank watched him unperceived; then, when at length the old gentleman saw he was observed, he tried to straighten himself, to bring into his appearance that heartiness of manner characteristic of his whole bearing as a soldier.

"Good morning, good morning!" said he.

"Good morning," replied Cruikshank, adding an oath of annoyance below his breath as he went on working. These morning visits were very frequent affairs, and I suppose even gardeners object to interruption in their work.

"I just came up," said the old gentleman, "to have a talk with your friend—let me see, did I catch his name rightly the other day?"

"Bellairs," said Cruikshank, shortly. I can guess how he said it. There is that suggestion about his manner when he is making his bells that you might expect to find in any master of a bed-chamber. He moves, as it were, with a finger to his lips, as though he feared the faintest disturbance to the sleep of his princesses. When he consents to speech it is abrupt, and uncomfortably discouraging. The General, I can imagine, however, is not built of that fine fibre which can appreciate it.

"Oh, yes! Bellairs!" said he, overjoyed to find that his memory still served him well. "I just came up to have a talk with him. He was interested the other day in hearing that I was up in Dublin when we received the old Queen."

"He's out," said Cruikshank. "You'll find him round the cliffs with my wife."

Doubtless Cruikshank hoped that that would make an end of the matter. But he knows nothing of human beings, young or old. I could have told him differently. I know the type so well. My own father is one of them. His resources for wasting time are infinite. No doubt the same could be said of me. I am a lazy devil. But at least it is my own time I waste. With such men as my father and General Ffrench their sin is that they waste the precious time of others.

To be told, then, that I was out, to be given careful

instructions as to where I was, had no power to move the old gentleman one step upon the journey to find me. He was out upon that war-path which all garrulous old men pursue. It mattered but little to him who was his victim. And besides all that, it was Cruikshank really whom he wanted to see; wherefore, altering his position from one foot to the other, he began again on another score.

For how long he dragged the weight of the conversation from one point to another I do not know. It must have been entirely by his own exertions. I can conceive the sort of help that Cruikshank would give him. He brought it at last, however, to the subject he desired. He spoke of the forcing of plants and then the forcing of fruits. He spoke quite eloquently, Cruikshank told us, but there was a strain of nervousness in all that he said which even my gardener, my comptroller of the household, was constrained to notice.

"I felt," said Cruikshank to us afterwards, "as if something were coming."

He was quite right. Something did come. Out of the depths of his side pockets the old gentleman produced four partially ripe tomatoes.

"Well, you don't believe in forcing," said he; "but what do you think of these? We forced these in our little green-house. Quite a number of them." And he handed the whole lot into Cruikshank's hands.

"But why did you pick them before they were ripe?"

"Oh, they'll ripen," said he, easily; "you put them in a warm room in the window where they'll catch the sun. You'll be able to eat them in less than a week."

Now, there was a delicacy of insinuation about all this, far more delicate and subtle than the little girl with the basket of vegetables in one hand and a gift of flowers in the other. Those tomatoes were the property of Mrs. Quigley. Was this a present from her? Was he meant to keep them and ripen and eat them? Was he to buy them, giving the money for their purchase then and there? What, in the name of Heaven, was he to do?

Cruikshank is no hand at these delicate situations. He just stood, so he told us, with his hands full of tomatoes, as much at a loss for action as he was for words.

"They seem very good," said he, at last, "but isn't it a pity to have picked them before they were quite ripe?" And then he was for handing them back, for getting rid of them as quickly as he could.

But the old gentleman was far too wary for that. He took a step backwards. He even went so far as to thrust his hands deep into his pockets.

"No, no, you keep them," said he, "put 'em in a window, they'll ripen. But don't say anything to my sister about them. She agrees with you. She doesn't like 'em picked before they're ripe. Don't say anything to her. I only saw them this morning, and knowing you'd got a visitor I thought they might be just a little

—you know—dainty. You don't get tomatoes, not fresh like those, at this time of the year."

And then, standing back yet another step, his head on one side regarding the magnificence of his gift, he paused.

"How much did you give him for them?" we asked, when he had told us so far.

"My God!" said Cruikshank. "I didn't give him anything. He'd brought them as a gift. I suppose he'd stolen them out of his sister's hot-house, but I couldn't refuse them on that score. It would have offended him still more if I'd offered him payment."

I picked up one of the tomatoes that was lying on the table. It was as hard as a bullet.

"What a pity it is," said I, "that you don't study human nature. He was badly in need of some money."

"He's run out of cartridges," said Bellwattle. "I'm very glad you didn't give him anything. Now he can't shoot the rabbits down in Power's field."

"Is he as poor as that?" I asked.

"Lord, yes," said Cruikshank. "I've known him save up his last cartridge for days."

"I expect that's it, then," said I. "He's run out of cartridges."

Bellwattle put her arm round Cruikshank's neck.

"You've saved twelve little bunny rabbits," said she.

"But I haven't," he replied. "I can see it now. When he was going, he stopped just before he got to the gate and called out that he was going to the post.

"'Can you lend me a shilling?' he said; 'I've forgotten my purse.'"

"And you lent it to him!" cried Bellwattle.

Cruikshank nodded his head.

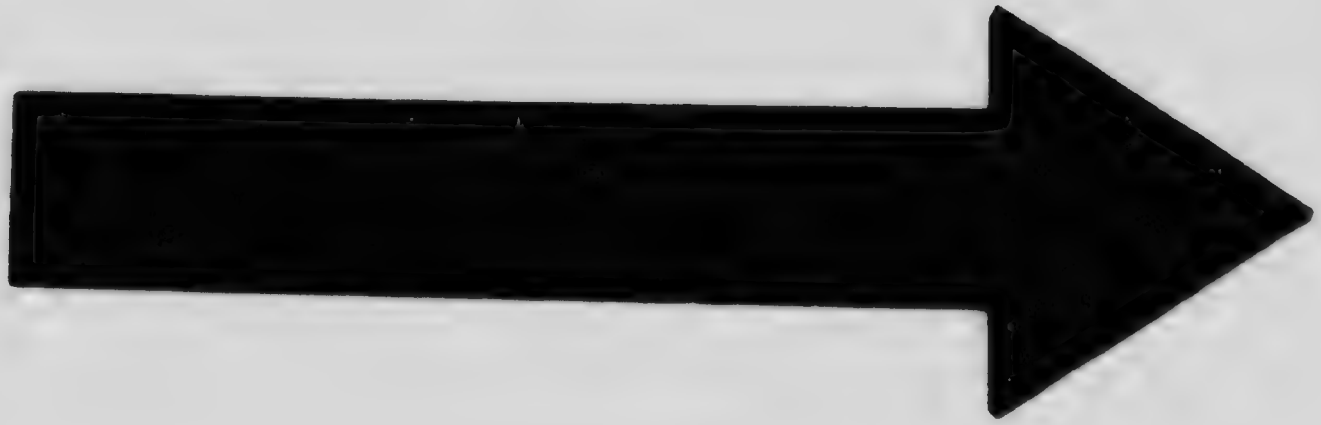
"You'd better count that given," said I. "It was the price of the tomatoes."

CHAPTER X

CLARISSA has got my letter! But that is not all. I delivered it myself. I have met Clarissa, have talked with her, have passed that third stage in my journey which an odd week or so ago I would not have credited as possible.

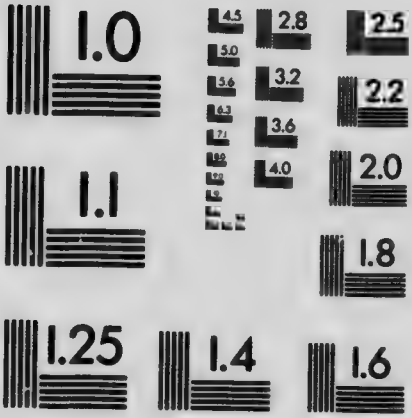
Oh, but you will laugh when you hear the little that I said to her—the little indeed that she said to me. Yet it is the beginning. She still has my letter to read. I find myself gazing into distances which I never knew of, seeking for the answer she will give.

It came about much as I had expected; more easily, too, for the matter of that. And the longer I keep my secret to myself, the more confident am I that Bellwattle knows all about it. Does she speak to her husband, I wonder? Somehow I think not. The days go by. The hope of fish in the river becomes more and more remote. Cruikshank works on solemnly in his garden and never says a word to me questioning why I remain. Perhaps that is because she has told him. Yet is he ever actor enough to keep it so stubbornly to himself? He may be. Possibly I do not know the nature of these gardeners. There may be depths in Cruikshank's mind which I have never fathomed.



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Whether that be the case or no, Bellwattle guesses. I am quite sure of that. A thousand times I have been so eager to know the nature of her guessing that I have well-nigh told her all. It has been on the end of my tongue when a sudden timidity has caught it back. And now that I have met Clarissa, the timidity is no less. It is more.

Three nights in succession, Bellwattle and I have been out in a fruitless search upon the cliffs. Not a soul have we seen. I have even begun to wonder whether the Miss Fennells were made suspicious by the questions I had asked, for on each occasion a light was shining in Clarissa's room and not a sign of movement came from within the house.

"I thought," said Bellwattle, on the third evening, "I thought the Miss Fennells said they took their invalid out for a walk when it was dark."

I did not look at her. I knew she was looking at me.

"So they said," I replied.

"I'm rather curious to see that invalid," she went on; "they say in the village here that she's not an invalid at all."

"What then?" I asked.

"Oh—all sorts of stories. Tierney told me the other day—Tierney is our town-councillor and plumber. As a human being he lets the drains get into disorder—as a town-councillor he gives himself the contract to see to them, and as a plumber he partly puts them right. You ought to meet him. But he told me that she was a black from the West Indies."

"How did he know that?" I asked, quickly, and the next moment I saw how my words must imply knowledge to her.

"He doesn't know it," said she. "Why should he? Isn't it when people don't know things that they talk about them?"

I laughed. If she applies that little piece of wisdom to me who say nothing, can there be any doubt but that she guesses at the truth?

"But what makes your friend Tierney suppose anything so extravagant as a black from the West Indies?" I asked.

She raised her eyebrows, which, in its way, is just as expressive as shrugging one's shoulders.

"I think the Miss Fennells have given it out that she comes from America, and if you think of the veil she wears always and the fact that no one in Ballysheen has ever seen her face, you've got enough to make people in a small Irish village say far more extravagant things than that. Mind you, I don't believe what Tierney says. I shouldn't be a bit surprised to find that she is beautiful."

That very nearly drew me; but not quite. I know she is beautiful. Not because I have that young man's word for it. I see her beautiful, as that type nearly always is. Every time the name Clarissa finds its way into my thoughts, there creeps in with it a picture which eludes all description of outline. I see a dim vision of deep dark eyes set in that faint blue-white—the white of old china he called it. God knows

I thank him for nothing, unless it be for that. She has an olive skin, so tenderly touched with those southern suns that ivory might match it. Her mouth is sad, for when the God of a Thousand Circumstances takes a woman in His grasp, He lets fall two drops of sorrow in her eyes and moulds her lips to His own making. Then her hair I know is black; but in the blackness of it I can see a light of brown as though it once had caught a sun ray in its net and caged it there for ever.

More clear a vision than this, the picture of Clarissa denies me. I shall know her no better when I see her face than I know her already now; yet something dreads me to think of that first moment when she removes her veil. The dread is not that I shall see her. The look in that little nursery maid's eyes, in many another woman's face as well, comes quickly into my mind and I know it is the dread that she will see me.

Is it from such men as I that women take advice? Sometimes I am afraid she will not listen to me, that she will never go back to her sunny islands; that she will let herself be taken into the heart of that underworld where her lover has the substance of his being, and there will be a still deeper sorrow, a greater trouble than before, which she will never bring to me.

It was a sore temptation then to tell Bellwattle how beautiful I know Clarissa to be. But I resisted it, and we returned that third evening without reward.

It was the very next night, however, that our patience bore fruit.

"Are you two always going to go out in the evening?" asked Cruikshank, when we looked into the room to give him a friendly nod of the head.

"Come with us," said Bellwattle.

He shook us a negative, and I thought for the moment, I could not tell you why, that he was not happy; that somewhere in his philosophy, a link was loosened that made the whole chain weak.

"Do come," I said.

But he shook his head again.

"I've got this book to read," said he. "A man's more than a dog in the manger. He's not contented with the sole occupation of his stall; he wants other dogs to sit by and envy him. Out you go."

And out we went, but it was cold that night and, coming back to get a shawl for Bellwattle, I saw Cruikshank through a break in the curtains. His book was laid down upon the table and his face was hidden in his hands.

"There is no sense in disturbing a man when he's like that," I said to myself, but it fell heavily on my mind and I wondered whether any man's philosophy were complete.

Then I came back to Bellwattle I said nothing. A man's wife knows more of him than does any outsider, and to ask her questions is only to put oneself further from the truth. Until we came to the Miss Fennell's house, we walked in silence. It was then,

when I saw no light in Clarissa's window, that I felt the first intimation of what might soon be accomplished in the progress of my journey, and my hand went to my pocket to see that the letter was there.

"They've gone to bed early this evening," said Bellwattle, whereby I knew that the same thought had crossed her mind as well.

"How do you know that?" I asked.

"The light in that upper window. It's usually lit at this time. P'raps they've gone out for their walk."

I agreed that it was possible, but I said no more. She saw from my manner then, no doubt, that it was useless to try and draw me further, wherefore, as a woman will, she shot away at a tangent and talked of London, that I might think the matter no longer interested her. She asked me what I did with my days.

I could not help but laugh at her question.

"Ask me what the days do with me?" said I, "they are my masters, not I theirs."

"You do nothing?"

"Nothing that can be called anything. When a man is situated in life as I am, having been brought up to no profession, supported by a father whose support would be generous were it not that he gives as little as he can, when a man is situated like that, to do nothing is an art which needs the most exhausting study, in which so many are failures that you may count the successes on the fingers of your one hand."

"And you've succeeded?" said she.

"It's the only pride I have," said I. "There are not many men in London who can do nothing so well as I can on fifteen hundred a year."

"And you've no ambition to do anything else?"

"There's only one ambition," I replied, "only one worth the having."

"What's that?"

"To do something for some one else."

"Well?" said she, expectantly.

"Well!" I answered.

"What's to prevent you being ambitious?" she asked.

"The fact," said I, "that there is no one else."

She stopped for a moment, and looked down the cliff-side where Dandy was worrying himself with a rabbit hole. Hearing the cessation of our voices he looked up, and his nose was comical with red earth.

She laughed at him and then she said: "Isn't Dandy some one?"

"I'm constrained to find him everybody," said I.

She looked at me queerly for a moment—no, not queerly, for in her eyes, as it were, I felt the touch of her hand and why, I cannot tell you, for she is twenty-seven and I am forty-three, but a thought of my mother in no special sense just passed across my mind. Possibly it was because no woman has looked at me like that since she was alive; or maybe it was a sentimental imagination. The best thoughts we have, the best emotions, so I am told, are only sentimentality.

I could not tell you how long that glance of hers had

lasted when out of the silence, which, like a tireless sentinel, stands guard upon those cliffs, there came the sound of nearing voices. They drew closer out of the immense stillness as figures come towards you out of a mist. We turned for an instant in their direction, and then as Dandy, hearing them too, rushed up the cliff and off into the darkness, barking wildly, Bellwattle looked at me and whispered——

"These are the Miss Fennells," and she laid her fingers tight about my wrist.

I knew then that what I had felt in her eyes was true. It had been the touch of her hand.

CHAPTER XI

THERE was no need for us to announce ourselves. Dandy, who in two weeks has made himself known to the whole village, had finished with every preliminary. As the three figures came in sight round a sudden bend of the cliff path, we could see him trotting amiably by their side.

"And the invalid," said Bellwattle, in a whisper.

"And the invalid," I repeated, below my breath, but I know she did not hear me. I scarcely heard myself.

Another moment, in which my eyes were staring through the darkness at that dim third figure which I knew to be Clarissa, and then we had met. A nervous, hurried introduction took place. I caught no word of it then but the name—Clarissa's name. They said Miss Fawdry. That was all I heard. It was what I saw which occupied all my attention. Clarissa was dressed in black—just as I had imagined. A thick veil covered her face, falling to her shoulders, so that only a dim line of the features could be seen behind it. She bowed to us both in a quaint, timid, old-fashioned way. I shall never forget this my first meeting with Clarissa on that wild headland of those cliffs in

Ireland. There will never die out of my ears the long, lonesome cries of the sea birds, the sound of the waters rolling to the rocks three hundred feet below, or those vivid stillnesses which fall upon you between the sound of the waves and the child-cries of the gulls away at sea. These things and that little black figure of a girl whom I had come some hundreds of miles to meet on the bare credit of a story—these I shall never forget.

It could not have been so pregnant a moment with Bellwattle. For if indeed she guesses—as well I know she must—there is bound to be many a mistake in her speculations. Doubtless, she thinks I have met Clarissa before; that, like some Knights of the Round Table, I am pursuing the lady to whom my heart is captive. Whatever she thinks, there will be romance to it. There is not that in a woman capable to conceive so prosaic a mission as mine. Thank God for it too. A woman will stitch the thread of love into the heel of an old sock while a man is impatiently waiting to put it on. For romance to a man is the winning and riding away—away into the heart of a sunset—but to a woman it is all the horizon and beyond.

Whatever, then, she thought at our first meeting, there was no such confusion in her mind as was in mine; wherefore she went straight to the point, inquiring of Clarissa's health because, I suppose, it was the most natural thing to say.

"Are your eyes any better, Miss Fawdry?" she asked.

The Miss Fennells glanced quickly at her, and in those glances I felt the cruel power of their coercion. By those glances they forced her to give the answer that she made.

They were no better, she said, quietly.

"But they're no worse, my dear," added Miss Teresa, cleverly. "I'm sure the doctor that Harry made you see in London has treated you the right way."

She made no reply to that. When forced to play a part, it must be difficult to enter with one's whole heart into the spirit of it. I could hear in her silence the brokenness of spirit, that exhaustion of courage which must come when the wings have been beating, ceaselessly beating against the bars of a cage.

They gave her a moment in which to make answer, and then, glad, no doubt, of her silence, they declared they must be going home. Miss Mary held out her hand.

"Good-night, Mrs. Townshend," she said.

But it needed very little cleverness to be cleverer than that.

"Oh, we're coming back, too," said Bellwattle. "We had just agreed to turn when we heard your voices."

So we all set back for Ballysheen. Now, this was the moment I had been waiting for. Their suspicion fell least upon me. By her questions alone, if not also from the fact that she was a neighbour, it was their strategy to manœuvre that Bellwattle should walk with them. Not for one moment would they have

trusted her alone with Clarissa; wherefore, the path being a narrow one, Miss Teresa walked first, leaving Bellwattle in the charge of Miss Mary. And so it fell out that I walked with Clarissa alone.

You may imagine how, with those few moments before me, my thoughts were like leaves on a swollen stream. Round and round my head they eddied and swirled, and not a one could I grasp to give it words. We must have walked fifty yards before a thing was spoken. Now, this is not my way with women. As a rule I talk to them with ease. True, it is while they are talking to Dandy, and doubtless that gives me confidence. But in this case everything seemed different. I might never have spoken to a woman before. But when we had walked so far in silence it came to desperation with me. I said anything; what, indeed, seemed nonsense at the time. In the light of things, as I see them now, I can imagine that it was the very best beginning I could have made.

"Are you happy in Ireland?" said I.

She looked round at me quickly. From an utter stranger I can understand how odd that question must have seemed.

"Do I like Ireland, do you mean?" she asked, and that was the first time properly that I heard her voice. It was a whisper, full of timidity. I had to bend my head to catch the words, and they sounded like the steps of feet in satin slippers through some far-off corridor of an old house. This is my way of describing things. It may mean nothing to you. I only know I

heard the tiny heel taps, and unconsciously I lowered my voice to answer to them.

"No," said I, and my voice ran almost to a whisper too. "No—I didn't mean that. You're shut up all day in that room with the white lace curtains. I don't suppose you can either like or dislike Ireland. You never see it. No—I meant what I said. Are you happy in Ireland?"

I swear if I had not said it in a whisper it would have frightened her. As sure as Fate, she would have run away. But because I whispered—by the chance of God, too, perhaps—she just spoke out of her little heart and told me she was not.

It was so simple and so genuine an admission that, though I knew it well, I was still utterly unprepared to hear her confess it. It took me completely by surprise. I found myself marvelling at her ingenuousness, for, as you must know well, it was so unlike her sex, who will seldom admit to any emotion but that does justice to their appearance, and never will they confess it to a total stranger.

It disarmed me. Had she said she was happy, indeed, I could have gone on gaily, knowing what I believed. But there is no so violent an interruption to conversation as the sudden truth. For a few moments it left me in silence. I could not have believed it possible that she was so unhappy as that, and all through my mind there surged an overwhelming tide of bitter resentment against those who were the cause of it. I cursed that young cub in

England from the bottom of my heart. I have no doubt my eyes had a ludicrous expression in them as I glanced at the Miss Fennells before us.

"What makes you unhappy?" I asked, at length.

She looked nervously about her as though there might be listeners everywhere.

"It's not like where I come from. It's all so dark and grey. It was so bright in Dominica. I know the sun shines here, like it did to-day—but it's so different."

"White lace curtains make a difference," said I. "So do black dresses. Why don't you wear your canary-coloured satin?"

For just one instant, she stopped quite still. I was almost sure that I had frightened her too much; but perhaps it was only with curiosity that her eyes burnt through that thick impenetrable veil. Of course, she was curious. I guess how her heart set beating straight away.

"What do you know about my satin dress?" she asked, as we walked on again.

"I know a lot," said I; and then it seemed to me the moment I had been waiting for. I took the letter from my pocket.

"Are you good at keeping secrets?" I asked.

She bent her head. Every one is good at keeping secrets, but you must ask them first. They never know how good they are until they are waiting for a secret to be told.

"Well, I want you to read this letter," I went on. "Don't let the Miss Fennells see it. Tuck it away into

your dress. Read it to-night, and when you can, let me have an answer. I don't know how you can manage it ; you must find that out for yourself ; but let me have an answer. I shall stay here in Ballysheen till I get it. You heard my name, didn't you ? Bellairs —I'm staying with the Townshends. Send the answer there—to their house—if you can."

So I gave Clarissa the letter. I saw her bury it in the stiff bodice of that black prison dress where her heart beat warm against it.

I had given it only just in time. A few more paces and we had come to the end of the cliff path. Here, as you know, it broadens to a wide road and the wall begins, protecting the field where stands the Miss Fennells' house.

By clever manœuvring they made us all come into line, and we walked the remainder of the distance, talking of such ordinary things as the Miss Fennells are conversant with. Their range of topics, I must admit, is most limited even then. When we had said good-night and I had felt the first touch of Clarissa's hand—a slight hesitating little hand it is—Bellwattle and I walked home.

She said not a word to me. That is so wise in women. However wrong in fact their guessing may be, there is a fundamental instinct of right about it which tells them what the circumstances demand. A man, guessing as she had been, would have poured questions upon me, asking me what I thought of Clarissa, and not because he was curious, but only to find out if he were

right. Now, a woman never does that. To begin with, she knows she is right, and, filled as she is with curiosity, she asks no questions. She just finds out.

So Bellwattle said nothing. She just let me think. And over and over again I thought: "Will she go home if I tell her to? Will she go home if I tell her to?"

But there was a little thought that kept creeping in between each one of those questions. "Will she ever go home if I tell her to?" I said to myself, and then I thought how warm that letter would be when, in the secrecy of her bedroom, Clarissa should take it from her dress to read. And the more I asked myself the one, the more I pictured to myself the other.

"It's the very devil," said I at last to Bellwattle, "when you can't think the thing you want to think."

"Do you think you really want to?" said she.

Now, what the devil did she mean?

CHAPTER XII

THREE days have run by, and only that I have had no word from Clarissa, I have scarcely been conscious of their passing. Three days, and we have come into a new month, a more wonderful month even than that through which we have just passed; the most wonderful month in the year, were it not that June, July, August, September and October all follow after it.

I watched a lark this morning rise from a tuft of thick sea-grass, such as grows out on the slopes of the cliffs. The whole sea was of quicksilver, throwing back the bright light of a glorious sun. It spread far out to the line of sky, and they met in that haze of heat which makes the horizon so full of mystery. A mile out from shore a mass of gulls were crooshting, filling the distance with their hunger-cries as they flung themselves into the *mêlée* fighting for their food. I lay watching them, and even from that distance I could see the black body of a cormorant in their midst, diving and diving again, where the gulls could only feed upon the surface. He reminded me of the people who eat in the London restaurants, who have five meals a day; the people who are able to dive into their pockets and pay for food they never want, while the

match-sellers and the flower-sellers, the crossing-sweepers and the beggars outside are whispering their hunger cries like the gulls upon the surface.

"I've come to the conclusion that I don't like the cormorant," I said to Bellwattle.

She was lying back on a bed of heather roots. Her eyes were closed. She might have been asleep. I said it softly, therefore, lest it should wake her. She did not open her eyes, but she answered me.

"That's a man who eats too much, isn't it?" said she.

Of course, it may be that she had read my thoughts before I uttered them. I judge her quite capable of it. It was better than thinking she did not know.

"That's why I don't like him," said I. "Sit up a minute. You can see one there in that crowd of gulls. He keeps diving down and gorging himself in the underground grill-room while all those poor wretches are shivering on the pavement."

She sat up quickly, looking at me in amazement.

"Whatever are you talking about?" said she.

"That cormorant," I replied—"in the midst of those gulls."

"But I thought a cormorant was a man who ate too much."

"So he is—he's a bird as well."

"But we call those billy-divers."

"It would make no difference if you called them English gentlemen," said I.

She began to try and think it out; but in the midst

of her meditation, she saw a rabbit sitting on an ant-hill, brushing its nose.

"Look—there's a rabbit," she whispered. "Look at his little white tail! And there's another—further on. Why, there are hundreds of them!"

I followed the direction of her finger, and sure enough there were two rabbits.

"I wonder why it is permissible," I began, "for a woman to talk in hundreds of what she only sees in twos?"

"Well—I expect there are hundreds," said Bell-wattle.

I admitted the truth of every word she said.

"If there are two rabbits, there are bound to be hundreds," said I. "It's the nature of the beast."

"The creatures!" she exclaimed, suddenly finding it in her heart to be mother unto all of them.

"The only thing I regret," I continued, "is that I can't see them with such generosity of sight as you do."

She closed that one eye again, the eye that betokens her suspicion, and looked at me. When I betrayed nothing, she lay back on her bed of heather roots once more and at that moment the lark shot up from his tuft of sea-grass and went soaring away and away—up into the still blue of the vault of heaven.

There is nothing in life quite to equal it, that song and flight of a lark; nothing quite so magnificent in its simplicity. If the grandeur of monarchy were as simple as this, there would be no need of revolution;

if the simplicity of republics could ever be so grand, there would be no need of kings.

I, too, lay down upon my back, with my hands clasped loosely behind my head and watched him climb, quivering step by quivering step, up that long ladder of light. And ceaselessly with every breath, in-taken or out-spent, he poured forth his tireless song of praise. Up into the bright air that song rose with him; then, like a fountain playing in the heat, fell fast in glittering drops of sound that splashed upon our ears till we were drenched in it.

"I wonder who taught him," said Bellwattle, presently, below her breath.

"Surely there's no teaching in that," I replied. "It's just the unlearnt power to be one's self. If a man could make his home of dried grass and twigs and be content to build it fresh with every year; if he could live so close to the earth and be so little chained to it —he could do something as simply and as grandly as that without being taught."

Bellwattle looked round at me. There is a quality in her which is truly engaging. Whenever one talks seriously to her, she takes it seriously. She takes it literally, too.

"Would he be able to sing like that?" she asked.

"There are some men I know," said I, "who wouldn't."

"What could he do, then?"

"Among other things, be contented."

"Why don't you live like that, then?" she asked.

"Cruikshank does. I don't think he'd care if the house fell to the ground to-morrow."

"So long as his garden was not destroyed," I suggested.

"No, he wouldn't mind if his garden was ruined, too. It's making a garden he likes. Building his nest afresh, I suppose. There's a little cottage up behind the farm that belongs to us. It stands in a hollow on the cliffs. I'll show it you one day. He's going to make a garden there. If he were shipwrecked on a desert island, he'd begin the next day to choose a site. Is it site? How do you spell it? S-i-g-h-t?"

"It can be spelt that way," said I.

"Well, it's very silly," she continued. "I should have spelt it c-i-t-e. Can't see what they want the g-h for. But that's what he'd do anyhow—look out for a site for his garden, the very next day"

"And if you were shipwrecked with him," I asked, "what would you do?"

"Would there be any animals on the island?" she inquired.

"Most likely—little monkeys, parrots."

"Little monkeys! I should be all right. Besides, there's Cruikshank. When he's making a garden he's just too sweet for anything. He talks about it as if he was building a city, and we make out where all the flowers are going to live. It's like being God in little—making the whole world over again."

"He described it like that to me once."

"He always feels it like that—so do I."

I turned away, letting my eyes set out to that far line of sky and sea, for again I felt the sense of covetousness stealing over me. It was just the same as when I had envied my electrician and his little nursery maid. Now I was envying Cruikshank and his Bellwattle, grudging them nothing it is true, yet wishing I had won their secret of things, that I could make the magic garden of contentment as undoubtedly as had they.

"Do you know," she said, suddenly, sitting up as she spoke and resting her chin upon her knees. "Do you know I believe London is not really a place to be happy in. I don't know how to explain it, but I know what I mean. I always lived in London, you know, until we married. I was born in London."

"And you were never happy?"

"Oh—I've had the jolliest times imaginable—splendid times."

"Well—isn't that being happy?" said I.

She paused for just a moment and then, with an emphatic shake of her head, she said "No!"

"Could they really have been splendid times?"

"Yes—yes—they were splendid. I shall never have times like them again. They made me forget everything. Oh, why is it so difficult to explain? But it is that—it's just——" She stumbled, piteously at a loss for words. It was all there within her, bubbling to her very lips, dancing in her eyes. Only the words were wanting, and in the need of them her forehead wrinkled, all her features screwed themselves

up into a comical expression of pain. It was not really comical. It was more like some dumb animal—like Dandy, in whose eyes sometimes I almost fancy that I see tears because he cannot express in words the emotion which is a torrent within him. But at least I understand what he would say, and when it comes to such a pass I tell him so. I could not tell Bellwattle. To begin with, I did not know myself. She was driving towards some point which was vivid and real enough to her, whereas, there was only the dimmest conjecture in my mind. In such a case it is best to ask questions. Give her something to contradict, and in the excitement of being misunderstood a woman may hit upon her meaning unawares.

"If they made you forget everything," I began.

"Yes; but don't you see! That's just it! You're not meant to forget. It isn't forgetting that's happiness. It's remembering. I can see you don't understand what I mean. I didn't mean remembering things that have happened a long while ago, but being conscious—that's the word I want—being conscious of things while they're going on. Like that lark up there being conscious that it's singing like that; being conscious that it's the first of May, that the sun's shining, that the sky is blue, that the sea is—is like that——" she pointed to it glittering there below us. "That—oh, that God's in his Heaven—that's being happy. Trying to forget everything is only pleasure. And that's all they do in London. My splendid times were when I forgot, not when I remembered. When

I remembered, I was conscious of things—conscious that people were poor and starving, that I was only just one in a crowd, all crushing to see something that would make us forget there was drunkenness and filthiness and crime everywhere. Every newspaper placard in the street reminded me of it. The only times when I could get away from it were at a theatre or a jolly good dance or something like that; then I forgot—then those times were splendid. But I wasn't happy. I lie back here now on this heather and I look up at that lark—miles and miles up in the heavens and I don't want to forget a note of it—I don't want to forget that life is going on all around me. I should hate to forget it, because here it's all wonderful. If anyone here committed murder it would be whispered among the villagers in awed voices. No one would dare go shouting it down the main street. His own mother wouldn't recognise him afterwards if he did. Men get drunk, I know; they beat their wives, they starve them, they starve themselves and their children—life isn't any different, but things like that take their proper place. If a lark were to soar up into the heavens out of the heart of London, there would be just one man to see it, the man who writes to *The Times;* but all the other thousands would never know of it. There's no light in London, there's no air, there's no sound; it's only darkness and smell and noise. No wonder you want to forget when you live there, and I've had splendid times—forgetting. But I wouldn't change it for this—this waking in the

morning and feeling another day to be conscious of everything, another day to see the sky and the clouds, another day to feel the wind from the sea on your face. I remember so well the feeling of waking in London, the counting up what things could be done to make the time wear out until it came to the priceless hours of sleep and utter oblivion. Is oblivion right? What I want to say is forgetfulness, but I've said it so often."

She stopped, breathless almost, with her cheeks flushed, her eyes alight. I never heard her talk like that before. I shall probably never hear her talk like it again. Women are unexpected creatures; far more unexpected are they than incomprehensible. It had never been in the training of her to express herself; wherefore, in her own quaint ways, she had thought these things out in silence to herself, sometimes speaking them aloud in the mornings as she dressed, at night when she was going to bed. Cruikshank tells me she is one of those who talks incessantly to herself when alone. Sometimes he has thought she has been in conversation with someone, but on going to her room has found her alone, doing her hair, holding an animated argument with her reflection in the mirror.

But it was not so much the sudden expression of her thoughts and her philosophy that arrested my interest. It was the philosophy itself. Something echoed in me that it was true; that she had found for me the secret of my discontent. I wanted to pursue it then, at once; for philosophy is an elusive thing. Often

your fingers may clutch just the hem of its garment and still it escapes your grasp.

"Then here," said I, "do you never forget? Are you always remembering—always being conscious?"

She nodded her head emphatically.

"Always."

"How about winter? The lark doesn't soar in winter. There are no flowers—all the birds are frightened and hungry. You never see the sea or feel the sun like this in winter. Don't you want to forget then? Wouldn't you be glad of a theatre or a restaurant—a street with crowds of people, a gay glittering of lights or the noise of life? Isn't the whole world too still in winter? Don't you want to forget then that you're just one little solitary two-legged creature in a wild desert of a world—don't you want to huddle up close to all the others whose company makes this life seem less lonely?"

She gazed at me for a long, long while in silence.

"That's just what *you* feel—isn't it?" she said at length. "That's why you live in London on your fifteen hundred a year. You like the country well enough in the summer—I can see you do. You love it even more than you think. But in the winter, you believe you'd be miserable. You've grown into the habit of your theatres and your restaurants which really you hate. Look what you said about the cormorant. You can't do without your crowds of people, and you tell yourself that human nature is the most interesting and most lovable thing in the world.

But do you think that you ever see so much of human nature in a crowd as you do in one single individual? Do you think if we saw a whole flight of larks—flight or whatever they call it—do you think we should appreciate them like we do that little fellow up there?"

"This doesn't dispose of winter," said I.

She put her chin on her knees once more, and once more she stared out at the sea.

"There is no winter," she said, "except in people's hearts."

"There are no dead," I whispered to myself. In the suddenness of hearing her say it, it sounded as true as that.

"Explain that," said I.

"I can't," she replied. "It's just there is no winter. It's only a word—like saying it's twelve o'clock. There is no twelve o'clock. It's only that the sun's somewhere or other. That's just what it is in winter. In winter the sun's far away—it rains, the sky is grey, the sea is green. Cruikshank and I put on strong boots and mackintoshes and go out for miles into the country and all the time we keep saying, 'Do you remember the primroses in that ditch—do you remember the furze blossom on that bush?' Always 'Do you remember?' and not because they are gone for ever, but because we know that in that very spot we shall see those primroses again, that they are there, warm under the earth, ready and waiting to come up again, more luxuriant"—she screwed up her face over this word—"more luxuriant than ever."

"You're a wonderful woman," said I, suddenly.

What a fool I was. That broke the spell of it all. For suddenly she remembered she was a woman; suddenly she became conscious of her sex. It was as though I had thrust a gag into her mouth, had frightened her into silence. I shall never succeed in making her talk like that again.

CHAPTER XIII

CRUIKSHANK has looked up over the hedge of his garden and, for one moment, found the bitterness of the world. I have no doubt there is this hedge in every philosophy, over which it is dangerous to peep—a curtain which it is unwise to pull aside. Then it becomes a question, not of philosophy, but of courage; a question not of mind, but of spirit.

Such moments as these are bound to come; and, as it has been said of love and of hunger, so well may it be said of this—when Fear comes in at the door, then out of the window flies philosophy.

Notwithstanding all his quiet and retiring habits as a gardener, I should ever have declared that Cruikshank was a man of spirit. But I did not know he had so brave a heart within him as by misadventure he has shown to me now.

The other afternoon between lunch and tea, I lay asleep on a little square of grass shut in by fuchsia hedges and surrounded by dwarf rose trees. In the middle of the grass there stands a sundial. I have found this spot for myself, for though it is in his garden, Cruikshank would never have shown it to me.

When I told him about my discovery he said :

"Yes—I know—it's quite nice, but it has a feeling of sadness about it for us."

"Sadness!" I exclaimed. "Why it's almost the sunniest spot in the garden."

He nodded his head. "Yes—yes," said he, "I know all that, but a little dog we had is buried there—a small little chap that belonged to Bellwattle. He was nothing of a prize dog—in fact, I don't think he had any breeding at all. He was just one of Nature's dogs—Nature's gentlemen. I think that could be said of him. I found him being beaten by a tinker in the village and brought him home. He took to Bellwattle like a duck to the water. You can imagine how she took to him. Of course, as I say, he was not a prize dog, but his manners were of the best. Though he followed Bellwattle everywhere, he would never forget to thank me every day of his life for that little business with the tinker. His method of gratitude was quite original. He put his two paws up, scratching at me till he got my two hands to hold them, then he'd look straight into my eyes for nearly two minutes. I don't imagine I should have been surprised if one day he had actually said—'Much obliged.' I am a firm believer in the story of Balaam's ass."

"When did he die?" I asked.

"Only a few months ago. He was quite young. A motor-car killed him in the village. He was afraid of motor-cars. I fancy that when the tinkers had him they used to set him on to rush at cars in the hope that one day he might be killed and they could get compen-

sation. They're not fond of animals in Catholic countries. Anyhow he seemed to be paralysed with fright in the middle of the street just where it turns out of the village on the road to Youghal. The car came round the corner, and had I not held her, Bellwattle would have been under the wheels of it. I just got my arm round her waist in time. She struggled like the very devil with me. But there was no saving him. I could see that. It was all over in a minute. The car stopped further on—the people got out. My heavens! You should have heard Bellwattle's language! Instead of becoming incoherent, she poured out the vials of her wrath, never waiting for a word, using them all wrong, no matter how they came, but letting those wretches know just what she thought of them. Imagine Mrs. Malaprop gone mad with rage. It was something like that."

Indeed I could easily picture it. I know what she must have suffered too.

"And I suppose he's buried under the sundial? I can understand you don't care to go there. I'd often wondered, with her affection for Dandy, why she hadn't a dog of her own. I'm glad I never asked her."

The next time I got an opportunity, unobserved, I went back to this little corner of the garden. On the base of the sundial, where I had not noticed it before, there had been engraved the name of this little gentleman of Nature—Tinker they had called him—and there the sun above him beats out its hours upon the little dial of brass—the shadow of the gnome turns round, travel-

ling upon the eternal circle of its journey. A sundial is a noble gravestone. I think I have seldom come across more truly consecrated ground than that in which Tinker is buried.

And it was there, stretched out upon that little strip of grass, that I lay and slept the other afternoon. Bellwattle's voice it was that wakened me.

She was talking to Cruikshank on the other side of the fuchsia hedge. A garden seat is there under the nut trees, where once or twice in the warm days we have had our tea.

"There is something the matter," she was saying—"what is it? Is your indigestion all wrong?"

My eyes half opened. My lips half smiled.

"My indigestion is never right," said Cruikshank. "Even my digestion is not what I could wish it at times."

"Well—you know what I mean," said she. "Is it bad?"

"No."

"Then what's the matter? You're depressed?"

I began to feel the sleep clearing from my eyes. I had remembered that sudden glimpse of Cruikshank between the curtains only a few nights before. Another moment, I should have been sitting up and calling out to them that I was within hearing; but sleep was there still in every muscle of my body.

"P'raps I am depressed," said Cruikshank.

"What about?"

"You, my dear."

There was such a caress in his voice that I am sure he must have taken her hand or laid his own upon her shoulder as he said it.

"Me? I'm all right," said Bellwattle. "Why should you be depressed about me?"

"Because I imagine you're not happy. Of course I may be all wrong. I may be making a consummate fool of myself, but it's been growing in my mind every day that—that——"

"That what——?" said Bellwattle, and I was just preparing to sneeze or do something in the conventional order of things that they might hear me.

"That you're getting fond of Bellairs," replied Cruikshank.

There followed a space of silence. I do not know how long it could have been. It seemed unbearably drawn out to me, and then, Bellwattle laughed a low, soft, crooning sort of laugh—such as a mother gives to its baby.

"You dear, silly old fool," said she.

"Ah, but don't turn it off like that," he replied. "I haven't thought so for nothing. You go out a lot together alone and I know how romantic those cliffs are. He's a good fellow too—a sterling fellow. Don't imagine I think he has been making love to you. Of course I know he hasn't. I'm not suggesting so rotten a thing as a flirtation. Probably you neither of you have dreamed of it yet. But I have. You see I'm an outsider. And if there's anything in it, I wish you'd tell me. I wouldn't stand in your way. I don't think

I could blame you. I must be a dull dog to live with. He sees more of life than I do—he's got more to talk about. All I jaw about is the country. I can't talk of anything else. I suppose I should understand it—but I'd like to know."

I dared not move by this. If I could have crawled away without being heard, I would have done so; but there was a gravel path to walk down. They would have heard my footsteps on that. So I turned over and shut my eyes—tried to go to sleep again; but that was out of the question. I heard every word when Bellwattle replied.

"You'd let me go?" she said.

"If it made you happy," he replied.

And in that answer, in the very tone of his voice, I heard the signs of the struggle through which he had won to arrive at this generous spirit of renunciation.

"But do you think it would?" said she.

"I don't know."

Something happened then. I did not find it difficult to guess what it was. Her arms were round his neck in an impetuous rush; her face was close against his. That at least is how I interpreted the sounds which reached my ears.

"You dear old thing—why you're more than everything to me. I don't want you to talk of anything but the country. I love that better than any other subject in the world, and when you talk of it, it makes me feel that every little weed is beautiful." Then she laughed. "And you think I'm in love with that dear, nice, ugly

creature! Why, I shouldn't imagine any woman has ever been in love with him in his life. That's why I feel so sorry for him. A woman would have to get to know him so well, to forget how ugly he was. And no woman would ever take the trouble. But just because we go out every evening, you think I'm getting fond of him. Do you know why we go out?"

Probably Cruikshank shook his head, for there was no reply.

"You know that invalid who's staying at the Fennells'—the little girl from the West Indies? He's in love with her. He hasn't told me a word about it. I should think he's too sensitive about his ugliness to even say that he was in love. But he's been trying to meet her out on the cliffs, when the Miss Fennells take her for a walk. They met the other night. I suppose they've met before. I don't know how. But he's in love; I can see that. And she's engaged to be married to some one else. Now do you understand? Oh—my dear—my dear. Come along—don't think anything like that again. Come and count the buds on our rose trees."

I heard them move away. I heard the sound of their lips as they kissed each other, then I turned over on my face and looked down into the forest of grass stems where I found a little ant hurrying impetuously along about his engrossing business. For half an hour I lay there watching him till he was out of sight. I think a divine Providence must have sent that ant. It occupied my mind to see him surmount all his difficulties. And

then, just as I watched him disappear into a crevice of the sundial, I heard a scraping of feet and felt a rough tongue licking on my cheek.

It was Dandy. I took him by both shoulders. I set him upon his hind legs, balanced awkwardly in front of me.

"Look at me," said I. "Right into my face." His brown eyes gazed steadily into mine, so steadily indeed as his attitude would permit. "How long did it take you to know me so well that you forgot how ugly I was?"

He shook his head, and he laughed; then I stood up, taking him in my arms like a baby—just as I had done on his release from quarantine in Odessa.

"You're a good fella," said I. "You're a damn good fella."

CHAPTER XIV

I KNEW that I could not be very far wrong when I said Bellwattle had guessed I was in love. It is so like a woman. They are incapable of climbing to the summit of any other conclusion save this; what is more, they reach it where no foothold for conjecture seems possible.

Who but a woman, from such slender facts as Bellwattle has acquired by dint of persevering curiosity, would ever imagine that I am in love? Thank God, I am not so utterly in need of the mere rudiments of understanding. I know the truth of all that she said to Cruikshank. Women must know me well indeed before they can come to such tender thought of me as to forget that I am ugly. It is true, moreover, that no woman has ever taken the trouble. Why then should I be such a fool as to plunge myself in love?

Yet, as I think over that statement of hers, true as it is, there comes back into my mind that evening on the cliffs when first we met Clarissa. In the look in Bellwattle's eyes, I said, I felt the touch of her hand; what is more, it was only a moment later that she stretched out her arm and held her fingers for an instant round my wrist. Had she forgotten how ugly I was

then? It almost seemed so. Then why did she say that to Cruikshank? No—I do not understand women in the least.

Anyhow, she is wrong in all her deductions. I am not in love with Clarissa. It was not with love, when this morning Bellwattle came down the garden with a letter in her hand, it was not with love that I felt a dryness in my throat, or my pulses stopped and, with a sudden impetus, bounded on again.

I guessed it was the answer from Clarissa. Well—any fool might do that. She would not be bringing me a letter arrived by post. Therefore, my pulses quickened because I was on the eve of learning how my adventure was to progress. The cry of "Land Ahead!" thrills the sailor and sets his heart a-beating no more than did the sight of this letter to me. He may not know what land it is, just as I was ignorant of her answer; but that the answer had come and, to the sailor, that land is in sight, is quite enough to stir the blood and start it racing.

Bellwattle knew well who the letter was from. Her manner, her step, too, were of the lightest as she brought it down the garden to me. But there was that faint look of watchfulness about her which no woman, not even the cleverest, can shut out from her eyes. Could she have seen how my heart was beating, I am sure it would have added no more to her convictions. She knows I am in love, and there is no more to be said about it. No doubt she read my casual way of taking it as proof conclusive of my guilt. When, therefore,

I slipped it unopened into my pocket then, quite at her ease, with no show of curiosity, but just to let her see that I must not suppose her completely without perception, she said :

"A little girl brought it from the Miss Fennells."

"It's from Miss Fawdry," said I.

I think that must have surprised her. She was not quite prepared to hear me admit it so casually as that. So surprised was she, in fact, to hear my admission, that she almost forgot to show surprise at hearing who it was from. But it came. It came tardily.

"From the little invalid ?" said she, and her eyebrows lifted obediently to her voice. I am not so sure I did not love her myself just then.

I hid my smile, however, as I nodded my head.

"How funny !" she continued. "Fancy her writing ! She's nice, isn't she ?"

God bless all women !

"She's very nice," said I.

"I fancy she's too good for the man she's engaged to," she continued.

"Most women are that," said I.

She shook her head, and the smile in her eye was quite wonderful.

"*I* was engaged to Cruikshank once," said she.

I wonder what it is in men to inspire such a smile as that. I think I know why she said it though. Since the other day she has done a thousand little things to please him. She said that to please him then, even though he was not there. When, then, the moment of

pleasure had passed—for it had pleased her too to say it—she came back without delay to her gentle inquisition.

"Did she tell you anything about herself the other evening?" she asked.

"What does a woman tell an utter stranger about herself in ten minutes?" I replied. "For the matter of that what does she tell him in ten years?"

She glanced at me sharply.

"Not much, certainly, to an utter stranger," said she.

I swear to Heaven, she believes I have met Clarissa before.

"Well, I take it," said I, "that even after ten years a man is little better than that. How long have you been married to Cruikshank?"

"Seven."

"And do you think he knows you any better to-day?"

I watched with a smile the little frown that came wrinkling to her forehead. This was not at all what she wanted to talk about. It did not interest her in the least. From the moment that I had mentioned Clarissa's name, she had hoped that I was about to confide in her the whole story. To that end she had taken the conversation most gently by the hand and was leading it persuasively as you lead a wilful child. But it had struggled free, and with my assistance had set off in an utterly unexpected direction. She was standing there, watching it, as it wandered out of sight. No wonder she was annoyed. For that matter, no

wonder I smiled. I had done it, and nothing but force could bring it back again into the path where most she needed it. Now, force is no argument with a woman. She only makes use of it when everything else fails; then she breaks into tears or fans the storm of her anger till the clouds are heavy in her face, and the flashes of her eyes are more dangerous than any lightning.

But everything had not failed her. If she had lost in her first endeavour, I am perfectly sure she felt confident of ultimate victory. The frown soon faded from her forehead and, in another moment, I found it hard to believe that I had secured a victory at all.

"Cruikshank's not a person who knows much about women in any case," said she at length. "I think *you* understand women better than any man I've ever met."

Well—there was my victory gone from me for ever. It was the delivering up of her sword, of course, but she had sharpened her dagger on it before she placed it in my hands.

"But Cruikshank understands flowers," she went on, "and they are better than any woman. Come and see the cottage I told you about with the bit of field he's going to make into a garden. Or—I'm sorry—perhaps you want to read your letter!"

"That can wait," said I. "I'd sooner see the cottage." At which, both knowing it to be a most excellent lie, we smiled each to the other and set off through the garden.

Up a narrow boreen, banked on each side by low walls

of grass-sod and stone where grew violets and primroses in the company of moss and ladder fern, we made our way to Cruikshank's little cottage on the high land above Ballysheen. Here there are fields of young wheat, breaking in brilliant green through the stony, unpromising ground. There are fields of pasture, too, that stretch away to the sheer cliff's edge where the sheep browse and the gulls go circling all day long. So high are you there, that only a mere ribbon strip of the far sea is visible, but the muted sound of it as it swells upon the rocks, comes to your ears in a sonorous sibilant note, which grows and grows into the very music of the place. So swiftly do your ears become attuned to it, that soon you hear no sound of it at all; it is all one motive of the great, still symphony of Silence which Nature is for ever playing on her thousand instruments of string and reed.

We had walked some distance without exchanging a word, when Bellwattle stopped and pointed to a small thatched roof that rose above a hollow in the undulating land.

"That's the place," said she.

I stood awhile and looked at it from there. It was the only habitation within sight. Great lines of gorse bushes clustered all around it, dipping down out of view into the hollow below. High above it in the clear air a kestrel hawk hung poised upon the wind and far away along the near line of the land's horizon a man was driving a team of horses with his harrow, while in his wake there followed a glittering white mass of hungry

sea birds, twisting and turning in the air like myriads of paper pieces tossing in the wind.

"Is it always like this?" I asked presently. "Always as big and broad and grand?"

"Always."

"What a brave blast of yellow there will be when the gorse is out!"

"But has colour got sound?" said she.

"Sound! Why, when that gorse is all in blossom, it'll be like a thousand silver trumpets ringing their voices all day long."

"And the heather—when that's out? All this place is one mass of purple. What sound has that?"

I shook my head and laughed. It is the habit I have noticed in her before, that habit of taking one too literally when one's mood is serious.

"You're asking me more than I can tell you," said I. "I'm no expert in the classification of colours with the sound of instruments. You'll hear the note of it in your own heart if you listen well enough."

A pensive look came into her eyes. I thought she was trying to see the heather in bloom, to hear in the heart of her that deep warm note of sound which the wealth of its colour plays into one's ears. She was endeavouring nothing of the kind; for suddenly she turned to me and, in the most ingenuous way in the world, she asked me why I had never married.

"In the name of God!" said I, "what's that got to do with it?"

"You ought to have married," she continued. "If

women have heard you talk about things like that—the heather and the gorse—they must have wanted to marry you."

"I'll try to see the logic of that," I replied, laughing. "I'll try, during the next few days, and then I'll tell you why no woman has ever entertained such feelings of regard for me. Let's go on to the cottage."

Now, how is one to reconcile that with what she said to Cruikshank? I give it up. I shall make no further effort to understand her.

At the end of the boreen there was a gate. Its rusty hinges whistled the lilt of an air as I swung it open—that air which is a part of the great symphony we hear all round us. Then we were out in the open fields; the springy sea-turf was bending beneath our feet. Far on and away the rugged curves of the coast-line wound themselves to the horizon, with here and there a sleepy headland dipping its nose into the glittering sea. For a moment or two the sheep turned their heads to look at us, then, moving away with slowly wandering steps, they continued their browsing.

It was here I stood still again. The kestrel had dropped down the wind and was vanished out of sight. Only the gulls were left, sweeping their endless circles against the blue radiance of the sky. Here and there a frightened sand-martin, darting swiftly through the light, hurried over the edge of the cliff to his home, as though he knew a hawk were near at hand.

After a long silence, I turned to Bellwattle and confessed that she was right.

"Right? About what?" she asked.

"All that you said when you talked about living in cities—compared to this. This is where to live—fair weather and foul, this is the only sort of place to solve the riddle."

"What riddle?"

"Of why it should be that we must live at all. In a place like this, everything answers it. You're quite right; it's not worth living when you only live to forget that you're alive. Here everything calls to you to remember. 'Remember' is the word. Being conscious is only a stock phrase. People use it in little art circles in London. 'Remember' is the word. Listen to that gull—that's calling to you; listen to the sea— [illegible] time a wave breaks, it's the world drawing in [illegible] reath. Pavements and houses aren't alive like that. I try in London sometimes to think that the houses talk to each other—but how can they talk if they never draw a breath! Look at the sky! Look at the sea! You're absolutely right—it's impossible to forget here. I'd give all I know to live in that little cottage there in the hollow and remember the whole day long, the whole year round. But——"

"But what?"

She laid her hand on my arm again.

"It's not to be thought of," said I.

"But Cruikshank does it," said she. "Why shouldn't you? Is the cottage too small for your

fifteen hundred a year? It has four rooms in it. We'd let you have it. You could make the garden instead of Cruikshank. Things would grow in that hollow—I'm sure they would. Why is it not to be thought of?"

I had the temerity to lay my hand on hers, which still was resting on my arm.

"Cruikshank does it," said I; "but then, have you forgotten——"

"Forgotten what?"

"'It is not good for man to live alone.'"

She looked at me long and earnestly I could see it in her eyes that she would offer to help me by every means within her power. But the futility of it must have been as apparent to her as it was to me, for though her eyes were full of eloquence, she said nothing.

"Now do you understand why I live in London?" I continued. "Why I find company and humanity in crowds? Nearly every morning I sit in the Park and make up stories about the different people who pass by." Suddenly, again, I thought of my electrician and his little nursery maid. "Sometimes," I added, "they make them up for me. I have nothing to do but sit there and look on. It's better than theatres or restaurants. You mustn't think I find them the only resources of life in a city. Certainly restaurants are my theatres sometimes. The whole business is very much like a 'Punch and Judy' show. You can set it up at the corner of any street you like. When

you come over to London—if ever you do—I'll take you round and show you some of my little theatres. They are all over the place. Charing Cross Gardens when the band plays—that's one of the best I know; or any A.B.C. shop at lunch time."

I looked at her and laughed. I could not help it. Her face was so serious.

"Well—now do you see?" I concluded; "when you're alone, forgetting is probably the best thing to do, and some ways of doing it are better than others."

For a moment she answered my look, then my laughter, after which, a notion suddenly seizing her, she left me.

"I'm just going into the cottage," said she. "No—you stay there. Sit down on the grass and read your letter," and she was gone.

My obedience was not implicit. I did not sit down. Instead I walked to the cliff's edge, and there, with all the steep fortresses of rock below me, shelving down battlement by battlement to the sea, I took Clarissa's letter from my pocket and read it.

They may have taught her many things, those two old maiden aunts, but they have not yet taught her to write or spell. It was the quaintest letter I think I have ever seen.

"*Dear mister Bellairs,*" it ran. And how it ran! A spider's legs dipped well in ink would scarcely run more wild.

"*Theer is a place out on the clifs ware I went wunse*

with him. I shall be theer on friday at twelve o'clock. the miss Fennels are going into yawl it is past the furst hed of the clifs. Clarissa."

That was all; but it was enough. It was more than enough. I had not hoped for so much. And yet, as I thought of her readiness to comply with my request, I realized how greatly it proved her love for that worthless young cub in London. For her, a prisoner, she was risking much, just to hear word of him.

"Will she ever listen to what I have to tell her?" said I, and, hearing my voice, Dandy came out of a rabbit-hole and looked up into my face.

"There's a rabbit hiding down there," said he.

"I don't care a damn about your rabbit," I exclaimed. "Will she listen to me—that's what I want to know?"

CHAPTER XV

Now, of course, that I know what Bellwattle has told her husband about me, I view Cruikshank in a different light. Now, moreover, that he imagines he knows my little secret, he does the same with me. I catch his eyes looking at me with a cunning expression that is humorous, too, as though he found a hidden meaning in every word I said.

"This place suits your appetite," he remarked the other morning, at breakfast, when I put away my empty porridge-dish and fell to work upon the fresh mackerel which had been caught at sunrise. "You don't eat like this in London."

Upon my soul, I believe he expects to see me waste away to nothing now that he imagines I am in love. Thank Heaven, a bitter experience has made me too prosaic for that. I may not be a philosopher, but at least I manage to live alone, which cannot be done with such romantic fancies as lead to starvation or any such tricks as that. Indeed, I learn much from Dandy, whose deepest passion never diminishes his excitement when it comes to the moment for Moxon to throw his two biscuits on to the tesselated pavement

in the hall. It is he who likes them thrown. At first I had disapproved.

"Can't you put those biscuits on a plate?" I once said to Moxon, "instead of flinging the food at him."

Moxon took my reproach most excellently, and replied he had begun in that fashion, but that Dandy had shown signs of disliking the plate. It appears he picked up the biscuits himself and threw them across the hall.

"As if to make out, sir," said Moxon, "that they was alive. So I thought it would add to the illusion if I did it for him. I fancy myself, sir, that they must taste nicer to him that way."

Of course, Moxon is a sentimentalist, which I am not; neither, for the matter of that, is Dandy. But Moxon—well, I rather fancy myself that Moxon would go down in weight a bit were he in love. He is built that way. Now, I am neither built that way, nor am I at the present moment martyr to any passion at all, wherefore I would eat a breakfast with anyone and be glad of it.

I do not think I have ever felt so keen an appetite in all my life as during these three days while I am waiting for Friday to arrive. One thing only concerns me. Our meeting is to be at twelve o'clock—midday. In all my thought of her coming, I have imagined it would be at night, when she might have found excuse to escape from the Miss Fennells and contrive to see me alone. But, no, it is to be in broad daylight. Even that heavy veil—which, indeed, it is quite

likely she will not wear, since I have said I know her eyes are well—but even that at such an hour will not dim the quickness of her perception. She will see me as Bellwattle sees me, as every woman has seen me since the first moment when an absurd and morbid sensitiveness induced me to notice such things. And then—will she listen to me? I leave it on the knees of the implacable gods.

Something tells me that I have not set out upon the wild errand of my journey for nothing. For so far do I believe in Destiny, that what we do, having within us some definite purpose to accomplish, is ordained to a certain end. Some end, it may be, so foreign to our thoughts, as is impossible of conception; but a definite purpose will always be a weapon in the hand of Fate to achieve a definite victory. I only pray that mine may be what I have hoped of it. I only pray that the result of my adventure may be the return of that little spirit in prison to her home in the burning heart of the sun.

I was up early this morning, for it is Friday, the day I have been waiting for. The sun beat down upon my face and woke me before it was six o'clock. It was then as I lay there, with my eyes half closed, that the sound of a far voice shouting on the cliffs came dimly to my ears. It was arresting, insistent, but not enough to stir me. I neither moved my head nor opened my eyes; but I listened, sleepily wondering what it was.

Presently a voice from below in the garden rose compellingly to my open window.

"Bellairs! Come down! There are sprats in the bay—they've got the nets out."

I jumped up from my bed and looked down. There was Cruikshank, dressed in such garments as served to make him decent and no more.

"Shove some things on," said he, "and come along with me as quick as you can. I'll show you the sight of your life."

I was with him in a moment, and we were hurrying along to the cliffs.

"Where's Bellwattle?" I asked.

"In the garden. She won't come and look at these things. I tell her fish have no nerve centres that they feel nothing; but it's no good. She sees them wriggle and that's enough for her. Ever seen a haul of sprats?"

I shook my head.

"My Lord!" said he, and in that exclamation he spoke more for the sight of it than if he had talked for hours. The silence that followed filled my imagination, till suddenly he broke it.

"Bellwattle says you're going to take the cottage in the hollow," he declared.

I opened my eyes wide and laughed.

"She told you that as a fact?" said I.

"Yes."

"When do I take possession?"

"Next year."

I laughed again.

"Well—what do you think about it?" said I. "Do you approve?"

"I shall be delighted. You must let me help you to make the garden. Only suggest—here and there. I know just what can be done with it."

"But do you really believe that I am going to take it?" I exclaimed.

"She says so. I suppose she knows what she's talking about."

"She said so—seriously?"

"Yes—quite."

Now what in the name of Heaven does she mean? She is not one of those women who talk for the sake of talking. I have been out with her on the cliffs when, for long stretches, she has been silent, and that, not for want of things to say, but because there have not been words good enough to say them with. Then what does she mean when she tells Cruikshank that next year I am going to take the cottage in the hollow?

"Don't say anything about that," he added. "I've just remembered that she told me I was not to breathe a word of it to you."

Then it is really true, so far as she is concerned. She really thinks of it as of some definite event that will ultimately take place. Upon my soul, the wiles and ways of women exceed the steepest flights of my imagination. I had told her it was out of the question; she declares to Cruikshank it is a certain fact.

However, there was no time to wonder about it then. We had come up the cliff road, past the fishermen's cottages and there, beyond the pier, by the steep purple rocks of sandstone, of which all this coast-line is composed, there was the boat putting out with the nets, racing through the water, the great sweeps bending from their wooden rowlocks with the sudden power of every stroke. It is this, this moment of casting the net at the stentorian command of him who stands high upon the cliff above, it is this moment which is the most critical of all. For hours they may have waited, knowing that fish are in the bay. For hours—I have seen them since, with the boat lying idly on the tranquil waters, the men dozing lazily at their oars, while high above them is that watchman the one man alone in all the village whose keen eye can follow the passage of the school—for hours they will wait in easy idleness as he sits there on guard about them, his chin resting rigidly upon his knees, his sombrero hat pulled heavily down above his eyes, motionless and silent as a piece of statuary which the rough hand of Nature has carved out of such living marble as is only hers to mould.

I have sat by his side and spoken to him, but he never answers. I have tried to see with his eyes the intangible tone upon the water which these myriad creatures make in their frightened passage to escape from the thousand enemies pursuing them, but never a sign have I seen. The eyes of God are set in the hollows of his head, for so it seems to me must the

Omnipotent Power sit silently upon the great cliffs of Time noting the struggles and the passages of all the countless little creatures that fill the vast sea of this world.

But he is not silent, this watchman, for long. A moment in his vigil comes when the muscles of his face begin to twitch and tremble. Another instant and he is upon his feet, shouting in guttural Gaelic to the men in the boat below. With his hat, now crushed within his hands, he waves, gesticulates and cries his orders from the cliffs above the sea, and in swift obedience to his voice that echoes and re-echoes from the giant walls of rock, the men put out from the shore. In a moment the mighty sweeps are straining back to the long, deep stroke, the little wave of water rises at the nose of the boat and swells and swells as she makes her speed, while in the stern there stands one of those swarthy fishermen, heaving overboard the coils and coils of dusky nets that sink down and away into the green water, leaving behind their little studs of floating cork to mark the circle they have bound.

That is a moment then! A moment when it seems the business of the whole world might cease to let this thing be done. And then the net is thrown at last. Without delay they set themselves to haul it in.

Cruikshank was not far wrong. It was a sight I shall ever remember, the casting and the drawing of those nets on that still May morning after sunrise, when even the sea was scarce awake. By the time

we reached the rocks, that great circle of floating corks had narrowed down to so confined a space that the fish were leaping from the water in their efforts to be free. Every man there had the bright light of excitement in his eyes and, as he lashed the water with his oar, driving the fish far back into the relentless prison of the net, one of the fishermen sang the lilt of a strange, barbaric song below his breath. Splash —splash went the oar like a giant metronome, beating the pulse to his song.

And then the last phase of it, the boats surrounding that great basin of the net, men ladling out the fish from the hissing water, filling the boats until they stood knee-deep in molten, running silver, and the gunwales sunk lower down and lower into the sea. How exhaustless it seemed, that mine of glittering metal! Again and again they plunged their great ladles into the bright green water; again and again they brought them forth heavy with the burden of such glory of riches as I have never seen. My eyes were filled with silver and emerald—emerald and silver, they seemed the only colours in the world.

It is over and done with all too soon. All too soon the nets are shaken out and the boats go toiling back—barges of silver bullion—to their little market-place by the pier. And then those white-winged scavengers of the sea, the shrieking, hungry gulls are all that are left to mark the spot where God has given one mighty handful of His treasure for the needs of men.

I stood there for a moment watching them as they flung themselves upon the water for the crumbs of silver which had fallen from the rich man's coffers. Again I turned my head for the last sight of the heavy-laden boats as they swung out of view around the corner of the pier. The next moment they were gone. The whole place was quiet once more. I looked about me. It was hard to believe that what I had just beheld was anything other than a waking dream. Then Cruikshank stooped down, and from a pool of water collected in the hollow of a rock, he picked up one of the little fish that had escaped. With a gentle hand he flung it back into the sea, and we both watched it as it floundered for a moment helplessly upon the surface.

"That gull's getting it!" said I, as I saw the great wings swoop down, but with an effort the fish turned and dived. We saw it shooting down, a little glittering arrow of light, into the unfathomable depths of green. Deeper and deeper it went until it was but a twinkling silver point, then the shadows swayed over it and it was gone.

"I have acquitted myself," said Cruikshank.

I looked at him for explanation.

"Bellwattle will ask me if I saved any of the sprats. I shall be able to tell her the truth for a change."

CHAPTER XVI

It was half-past eleven. I had heard the little tinkling chime of it from the open drawing-room window as I stood out in the garden.

Now, whether it were intuition or no, I cannot guess, but at that moment came Bellwattle to me, pulling off her garden gloves.

"Come round the cliffs," said she, "and have another look at the cottage in the hollow?"

"Will it look any different to-day?" I asked.

She shook her head.

"Just the same."

"Do you think, then, I shall be more inclined to take it if I see it again?"

"It's quite possible," she laughed; "but I haven't any real hopes of that. I expect when you make up your mind, it's not easy to get you to alter your destination."

"You mean determination," said I.

"Well, it's the counterpane thing," said she.

I asked leave to be amused. I felt my sides shaking. Bless her heart, for she laughed with me too. I suppose she knew she had said something very funny.

"Isn't it counterpane?" she asked, for her laughter

was not quite so hilarious as mine. There was the tentative note of query in it. In mine was the whole-hearted acceptance of the fact. "What ought I to have said then?" she went on, while I sat down upon the grass. "I suppose I ought to have said—counterfoil?"

I groaned. "Oh, don't!" said I.

"Well, what is it?" she cried, helplessly.

"You wanted to say counterpart," I replied; "and even then you'd have been wrong."

"I think English is a ridiculous language," she declared, at which we laughed all over again. "Well, will you come to the cottage?" she added, presently.

In all seriousness I rose to my feet and looked her straightly in the eyes. "I can't," said I.

"Why not?"

"I'm going out."

"Where?"

She saw me pause, I suppose, for the next instant she was apologising for her inquisitiveness.

"You mustn't apologise," said I, "I'm your guest. It's only right that you should look after me, and see that I don't get into mischief."

"Well—you mustn't think I want to know," she continued, quickly. "I don't. I'm sure it must have sounded like common curiosity, but it wasn't really. I expect I was surprised. I just asked without thinking."

"So you don't really want to know?"

"No," said she, emphatically, and she began putting on her garden gloves once more.

"I take it then," said I, "that you know already."

To that she made no reply. She walked straight down to the herbaceous border where the patches of arabis are just beginning to put forth their snow and, without looking round again at me, she began to work at those little things which women always do in a garden —those things, in fact, which God and Nature combine to leave undone for that very purpose. It is only women who are thoughtful of the little things in this world. That is why it is they who are given babies to bear.

I watched her, smiling to myself, as she gently uncoiled the tendrilled fingers of a plant of sweet pea that was growing up the trunk of an old apple tree. In the back of my mind I could hear her saying: "Let go—you must let go—it won't hurt you. I want you to grow up here."

Whereupon she began to train it in such direction as neither Nature nor its own inclination ever intended it to go.

"I don't know why Bellwattle is a good name," said I to myself, "but it is." Then with that I called to Dandy and we set off.

Whenever you may be engaged in any adventure, it comes easily to you to notice how wonderful a place the world can be. If the sky is clear and the sun is shining on that morning when you set forth to make mark in the insignificant history of your life, then, indeed, it seems as though the heavens were never so blue or the sun so bright. If there be clouds or rain,

if everything is grey in a moving mist, then you button the collar of your coat tight round you and swear to yourself that never was there such a day for doing things before. You remember, as Bellwattle would say, you remember everything. The hedgerows look more beautiful; there is a thousand times more of mystery in the dim forests of the long grasses. A wren hops, piping, in the budding hawthorn, and you tell yourself how everything is alive that day. But everything is always alive. It is only you sometimes who are dead.

So I felt that morning as Dandy and I set out to meet Clarissa. There seemed an added touch of spring in the turf beneath my feet. Dandy felt it as well. No obstacle that came in his way did he climb. He jumped every single thing. If I had not been forty-three, I should have jumped them all with him. There was no forgetting between Dandy and me that we were alive. If his expression of it was more strenuous than mine, it was none the less real for that.

In the breaking buds of gorse, in the clustering sea-pinks ready to bloom upon the unapproachable pinnacles of rock, in the great broad surface of that glittering mirror of the sea, in the gentle sound of its breathing and the clear, bright light of air that filled into my lungs like a draught of snow water, I felt the wonder of the day as I have never felt it before.

All the apprehension of what Clarissa might say had gone from me—all the fear of what she might think when first she saw me in the broad light of day, seemed

caught away into the breeze that freshened round those headlands. It had utterly gone from me. I forgot that I was ugly. I forgot that pitted horror which has disfigured me since I was a little child and my mother clutched me to her breast when I returned from the isolation ward. For that—since it is better that you should understand it—is why the young nursery maid turned her eyes to Dandy that day in the Park.

But I had forgotten it all. I might have been the Apollo Belvedere—a god, with all those physical qualities of perfection that a god should have. My heart was as light as the air I breathed and when, in the distance, silhouetted against the glowing white line of the horizon, I saw the fragile figure of Clarissa bent slightly as she leaned against the wind, I felt that I had accomplished what no god, with all the aids and instruments of Olympus at his hand, had ever done before.

The moment he discovered we were not the only people on the cliffs Dandy raced off to meet her. He is always my harbinger, carrying messages of welcome to friends and enemies alike. I cannot cure him of it. Times out of number he has tried to force me to associate with men whom I detest, and he says such things to women about me as make me feel absolutely ill at ease. By jumping from one to the other of us, he endeavours to set up a current of mutual adoration which, while at times it may not be distasteful to me, is very embarrassing to the few ladies of my acquaintance. He would have had me married a thousand times over if he could—but the lady has usually said,

"Lie down, little dog," just at that very moment when he has thought he was within a t-il's wag of success. It is, I know, because he does not realise my physical disqualifications and, no matter how often I tell him that I am an ugly devil, he has never learnt to believe it yet.

All the things he said to Clarissa that morning, I shall in all probability never hear. Whatever they were, she listened to him. I saw her bending down and patting his back as he laughed and chattered to her in that inimitably friendly way of his.

There was a good distance separating us. I had a quarter of a mile or more to walk along that tortuous cliff-path before I came up with her and, before I had half accomplished it, Dandy had returned to my side.

"There's a lady along there," said he, nodding his nose in her direction.

"I know—I know," said I, sharply. I think I must have been annoyed that he had reached her and spoken to her first. He is quick to take these sudden tones in my voice, as quick as many a human being. Wherefore, when he heard it then, he dropped back softly to my heels and trotted along behind me. A moment later, I felt that I had been unreasonable, so I looked back over my shoulder and in a cheery way I told him that while I was talking to the lady, he could go and catch rabbits.

"You can do anything you like," said I, "so long as you don't keep jumping on us."

Directly he heard the change of tone in my voice, he

started laughing from ear to ear and, taking me without hesitation at my word, he raced off into a clump of furze bushes when by that time I had covered the distance between us and had reached Clarissa's side.

She was wearing a veil; but the whole spirit of the day was still with me. I felt so sure of myself and my adventure that I did not even think to be relieved. When then I took her hand, it came quite easily to me to laugh with the sheer consciousness of it all and I found myself saying—

"This is quite an adventure."

CHAPTER XVII

Not far from the place of our meeting there is a rugged pathway, winding down the steep cliff side to a table of rock below. Your feet must be sure as the feet of a goat when you venture down this narrow edge of the world; but once you have reached it, still greatly high above the sea, you may sit there like a sea-bird in the sun and never a soul that walks the cliff path up above will dream of your existence.

It was to this spot that I persuaded Clarissa to trust herself that we should have our talk alone.

"People might come," said I. "I do not want you to get into trouble."

The descent was not quite so difficult as it looked; though I remember the first time when I saw Bellwattle disappear over the cliff side and vanish out of sight, I almost thought she had gone for ever. Now I started slowly first, pointing out the footholds for Clarissa's little feet. Dandy went before us, doing the journey six times over; running back again and again to show us how easy it was.

It is wonderful the way an animal will take for granted whatsoever situation may come its way. He asked me no questions about Clarissa, showed no

surprise that we should know or meet each other there. The adventure it was with him. The adventure it was with me as well, and the sense in my mind that this little creature, with her shy and timid voice, did not belong to me, gave me all the hardihood of a buccaneer, the very daring of a highwayman. It made, in fact, the thrill of a great romance go tingling in my veins.

As we came to our plateau of rock, a white cloud of sea-birds—herring and black-backed gulls, guillemots, every kind and variety—rose with a rushing burr of wings from their resting-places. Dandy stood there bewildered, looking after them, his eyes in every direction at once.

"Now," said I, when we were seated, "we can talk here till doomsday without interruption," and although I heard the things I said falling easily from my lips, I was by this becoming so nervous and confused in my mind that thoughts would not shape themselves. I could not conceive what to speak of ne.. It failed me utterly to begin.

It was an odd little silence that came between us then. Even Dandy did not offer to smooth matters out, for I had told him there was to be no jumping. He simply lay, therefore, full-stretched upon the rock where the sun had warmed it, invitir.g it to warm him in turn. And all that time I kept looking at the sea, then at her, last at Dandy, then back once more to the sea.

She appeared so strange with that heavy black veil falling in folds from the rim of her straw hat. It seemed in my mind as if I had known her so long, so

well, and yet, not even then, as she sat beside me on those wild cliffs, had I ever seen her face. It is not seeing a woman, to have nothing but a hat and a veil, a skirt and a pair of boots to look at. All that I knew of her was the touch of her hand and, much as it may have meant on our meeting that first night upon the cliffs, it was ill-sufficient for me now. Indeed, I was not content with it; so, leaning forward, at last I broke the silence, asking her to take off her veil.

"Surely you can't shut out the sun for ever," said I.

"I'm so afraid," she answered. "If anyone saw me and told the Miss Fennells."

"But no one will see you here."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure. Why are you so afraid of the Miss Fennells?"

She began a nervous interlacing of her fingers.

"Am I afraid of the... ?" she asked, ingenuously.

"You are—but why?"

"I owe them so much—they've been so good to me. And they'd be angry if they knew I had been seen without my veil."

"Why would they be angry?"

I found myself speaking to her again in whispers, as you speak to a little child in the dark to wile away those first few frightening moments after the candle has been blown out.

"Why should they be angry?" I repeated.

She glanced down in hesitation at her fingers.

"Because people would know——"

"Know what?"

"That—that I'm not quite a white person."

I have never heard anything just so simple in my life or, for the matter of that, have I ever heard anything so pathetic. Not *quite* a white person! Great heavens, that whiteness or blackness should mean so much to us who in each other see the imagery of God! The blackest man and the blackest woman I have ever known were white. It is the colour of the heart that matters.

"Take off that veil," I said suddenly. "Take off that veil and let me see. I don't want to find you a white person—it makes no difference to me."

I don't know why I spoke about myself. Surely too she must have wondered at it more than I. But my blood was hot with anger. Those old women, with their little ideas of family, believing one human creature made better than another, and that by the virtue of blind circumstance, they made me forget what I was saying.

"You've no reason to consider what the Miss Fennells think. They'll count for nothing when men and women are added up in heaven. Let me see for myself. Take off your veil."

It sounds, I admit, as though I had been rough with her, but it was not so. My voice, I am sure, was raised no more above the whisper. It was only that there must have been a different tone in it. And surely in a voice, in what not besides, that is everything. Whatever it was, she obeyed. I watched her hands as they rose to the knot in which the veil was tied at the back of her

hat. Her finger-nails alone would have betrayed her secret; but they were wonderful, nevertheless. I have seen small shells on a sandy beach just like them; shells wet with the water from the receding tide.

At last the knot was loosened. She took away the veil and laid it in her lap. I count that one moment in which I have lived, that moment when, with the sudden glare of the sun, she closed her eyes and I was free to look undisturbed into her face.

Once already have I described my imagination of her. There is no sense in going back to speak of it again. She was all I had thought. She was more. The tender olive of her skin brought no other picture to your mind than the lazy heat of the Southern sun. Not a moment's suggestion of racial coarseness was there in her features, but rather so delicate a refinement as made you apprehensive of what she must suffer in an ugly world. It was all as I had imagined it, even from that first moment in that restaurant in London, when I heard of her gown of canary-coloured satin. She was as timid as a little bird, with just those same quick, silent movements of fear. No wonder she was afraid of the Miss Fennells! No wonder she had allowed herself thus willingly to be caged. It seemed as I looked at her there, with eyelids closed and turned to meet the sun, that God had made her in such moment as when a potter, out of the sheer love of his art, turns for himself alone some slender, fragile thing upon the gentle motion of his wheel.

I knew then I had been right. My instinct, or what-

ever you like to call it, had had the light of truth in it when, on the bare hearing of her story, I had realised that here was a woman in trouble. However many hesitations I may have passed through, however often demurred, debating upon my right to interfere, all such considerations left me then. Her union with any man of the type I had seen in London could mean nothing but tragedy, nothing but pitiable disillusionment; wherefore my courage rose triumphant in me again. I was just waiting for her eyes to open that I might begin.

And at last she opened them. I saw that liquid blue white of old china, with the inimitable pattern of her great dark eyes set so wonderfully upon it; but as I looked at them and as they looked at me, it was suddenly borne into my mind the everlasting remembrance of myself.

The expression in her eyes was not the same as I had seen in those of the little nursery maid. I had never seen quite its like in the eyes of any woman before. But I knew well what it meant and instinctively, I suppose, I turned away and patted Dandy's head. He licked my hand in return.

"Well——" said I with an effort. "Isn't it a relief to get rid of that beastly veil?"

I said what I could—the first words that came to me. It would have been cruel indeed to her had I let her see that I had observed that expression of hers. But I am becoming adept at this. I can look at people now as though I were sure such thoughts of

me could never enter their minds. I have even heard it said that I fancy myself good-looking so unconscious do I appear to be. That, of course, makes me laugh, for that is truly funny. I often remind myself of it as a corrective for depression.

Somehow this morning, however, it seemed I did not assume it so easily—possibly because it hurt a little more than usual. But why—why should it hurt any more? Unless it were that, in the pride of my success, I had forgotten what, usually, I am quite prepared to expect. And so it was with an effort that I spoke. But when I looked back again, because she was silent, I found her eyes dreaming to the far line of the horizon.

"Do you take pennies for your thoughts?" I asked.

A faint blush burnt quickly in her cheeks and she brought her eyes to earth.

"*Was* I thinking?" said she. "I don't know what I was thinking about."

"Shall I tell you?" I suggested.

"You couldn't possibly know."

So there were thoughts and she realised them well enough to know that I could never guess them. Well—it was something to have discovered that. And then I hazarded still further.

"You were thinking," said I, "of him in London—how handsome he is. You were calling his face back into your memory, visualising every feature of it and trying to forget at the same time that other women might find it as handsome as you do."

She gazed at me in astonishment. So amazed was she that she could not keep it from her eyes.

"I don't think I was thinking at all," said she. "Unless I was wondering what you have got to tell me. What are you going to say? How did you know about my satin dress? Did he tell you? Do you know him?"

For a long time I looked at her, speculating upon how it were best to begin. When the God of a thousand Circumstances takes it into his hands to break a woman's heart, he does it often by infinitely slow degrees. The mills of God, they say, grind slowly—but I was wondering whether one sudden blow were not the kindest of all. And then again, the question of my right to deliver such a blow came surging to my mind.

"It is not I who am doing it," I said to myself. "I am but one of the links of circumstances which go to make the chain of this child's existence. That night in the restaurant in London bound me into it. It's inevitable that I say what I have come to say. That we are sitting here together now, proves it. If I had imagined such a situation as this suddenly possible when first I heard that story in London, I shouldn't have hesitated. It's only because I've come to it by slow degrees that I begin questioning my right. Of course, I, myself, have no right. But then, this is not myself—this is Fate."

Wherefore, so persuading my conscience, I found determination to tell her everything.

"I want you to listen to a story," said I. "It'll hurt you to hear it. You'll have to be brave—braver even than you are when you sit all day long behind those muslin curtains, waiting and waiting and waiting for what sometimes it seems will never come to pass. I've come all the way over here to Ireland to tell it to you, and when I've finished you'll think I'm cruel —that I have got some evil motive at the back of my mind; but whatever you think of me, it's far better that you should know."

It seemed as if my words were turning her to stone. She did not move. There must have been some apprehension already in her mind, for she sat there silently, asking no questions, as one who is nerving herself for the inevitable falling of a blow that long has been hanging over her. It was then I hesitated most of all, for suddenly there had come to me a picture of her in tears. I have never, as you may well suppose, made a woman cry in my life. No woman has ever come to me in trouble, and for the moment I mistrusted myself, wondering what I should do if she wept.

"You must be very brave," I said again, and then I told her everything; all that I had heard that night at supper when the glasses were tinkling and the violins played their everlasting melodies of forgetfulness.

Until that story was finished, I dared not look at her. It was enough to hear the silence with which she listened. Every word I uttered had the sound of

some dead thing falling into the fathomless depth of still water. I had not the courage to watch her face, seeing them vanish out of sight as they sunk one by one into her heart. I guessed what misery she felt, what utter despair had come to her as she listened to the bitter end. When I had finished, I turned and looked into her eyes.

"When you know little of it," said I, "the world is like that. Either you must know nothing, or you must know all."

She was fumbling with the veil in her lap. Her little fingers were picking at the threads of it as though there were the tangle of her life, if she could but unravel it. Presently she looked up and met my eyes.

"Why did you come all this way to tell me that?" she whispered, and there was such reproach in her voice as made me wish to God I had never spoken.

"Isn't it better that you should know," said I, "better than staying here in this prison with those two old women for gaolers, never seeing the proper light of day except by such subterfuge as you've had to make use of this morning?"

For another moment or two she was silent again; then suddenly she crushed the veil passionately in her hands. "I don't believe it's true!" she exclaimed. "It wasn't him you saw. It was someone like him, but it wasn't him. He's always promised he'd come back and marry me. We're going to live in London and he's going to take me to theatres. Oh—there are a thousand things we're going to do when we're married.

I'm going to see the world. And he's told me over and over again that he loves me. It wasn't him you saw. It was someone like him."

She could have persuaded herself to that belief had I allowed her, driving it again and again into her mind until the facts had become unrecognisable. But I had fulfilled my duty to Destiny so far. There could be no meaning in it if I turned back now.

" You forget the story," I said, " the story of Clarissa and the gown of canary-coloured satin. Your sitting here now with me is a proof that he was the man I saw. Don't deceive yourself into any belief to make yourself happy for the moment. Give him up—he'll only make you miserable; he's only thinking of marrying you because of what he will get by you. Give him up, go back to Dominica, break your heart for a month or two if you must. It'll heal again. You're in love with love, far more than you're in love with him. You don't know it perhaps. How should you ! Are you twenty yet ? Twenty and a day—not more. How should you know who's worth loving and who is not ? Every girl and every boy falls in love with love, and many a lover must come and go before a girl shall learn which one is worth the beating of her heart. Go back, my dear child, to that home of yours in the sun, where you can dress yourself in all those colours that make you happy; go back and love your love, with an aching heart if you like, until there comes along some better man than he is. You don't know him—you don't know anything about him. In that little island of yours, I've no doubt he

seemed a hero for Romance. But there's no Romance about him here. All that I say comes coldly from my head. You are only thinking with your heart and, of course, you don't believe a word I've told you. But think again, am I not a far better judge than you? Think again and keep on thinking. I know, but you only feel."

What I had feared then, came suddenly. She buried her face in her hands, and her shoulders shook to the sobs that were trembling in little broken gasps between her fingers.

I confess it, I looked helplessly about me. The bright light of the sea had grown suddenly somehow grey. Brilliance had gone out of everything. I wished a thousand times to Heaven I had never told her, yet knowing, every time I wished it, that nothing, not even the certain knowledge of her tears, could have stopped me.

At the sound of her crying, Dandy had looked up.

"What is it?" he asked me with his ears.

"For God's sake don't cry like that," said I and, scarce thinking what I did or said, I laid my hand gently on her shoulder and whispered again, "Don't cry like that. It makes me feel so contemptible. I know I have no right to come over all this way just to tell you things that will make you miserable. But I couldn't let it go. Everything seemed driving me to do it, because you were rushing blindly towards such a ghastly reckoning. You don't know the world that he is offering to show you. You think it's all a garden

where things grow beautiful; but London, where he's going to take you, is not like that. It's very difficult to find the things that grow beautiful there. Every effort they make in London is not to find the beautiful things, but to forget the ugly ones. The man who sees beauty in a great city like that is called a sentimentalist. They all laugh at him. If you wore your canary-coloured satin in the streets, you'd have a crowd of little boys jeering after you. Men and women would laugh into your face. Oh no; do go back to your island of sun and love your love, even if your heart should break. A broken heart need never be a broken spirit. A broken heart can be a brave and a noble thing. And sometimes—remember—it mends. But in London they'd break the spirit in you, as they're trying to break it here—break it so that nothing will ever mend it again. And then you'll begin that awful struggle towards forgetfulness—a struggle to forget that your spirit is gone, that the world is ugly with sin and shame and misery. And oh, they'll make it so difficult for you to forget. They'll wave placards in front of your eyes telling you that there have been murders in the East End, that women have died of starvation, that children have been killed at their birth. They'll scream to you from the housetops that the world is an ugly place. You will go to the theatres you speak of and there they'll tell you that men and women are unfaithful. They'll keep driving into your ears that truth and beauty are at opposite poles of the earth. Never, never for one moment, if they can help it,

will they let you forget. You will find those who have even passed the desire of forgetfulness, and that is the last and the worst stage of all. For there are people in London now who only want to remember that the world is ugly. They go to the divorce trials and the murder trials ; they rush in crowds to see a horror in the streets. Yet once upon a time, when they were children, they remembered that everything was beautiful. Then they played in their garden with hoops and with skipping ropes—you'll see them in Kensington Gardens now—and every day they woke to was a joy to live in. After a time came the phase when they tried not to see the placards of the newspapers in the streets, when they began to hear that the world was ugly, and then they tried to forget. They went out to the theatres and to music-halls, to dinners and to suppers, working like slaves, making the bricks of forgetfulness without the last straws of hope. Then, last of all, with spirit utterly broken, they accepted the ugliness of the world, took their pleasure in remembering it ; bought their newspapers and devoured them with their breakfast, mingling horror and crime and misery with the very food they put into their mouths. Those are the people in London to-day who will point out to you the ugliness of life and call it beautiful because it is real. Oh—my dear child—go back—go back to your little island and don't look for the ugliness of the world he wants to show you. Go back, and one day you'll come to learn that I was a friend—the best you ever had."

How it was, I don't know, but all this time my hand had been upon her shoulder. Suddenly then she shook it off and, brushing the tears from her eyes, rose quickly to her feet.

"I don't believe you!" she cried, and there was that note in her voice as when you try to drown the things you feel with the things you say. "I don't believe you!" she cried again. "You have some reason for saying all this—some reason that I can't see. You want to do him harm—you hate him—I can see you do."

That struck strangely on my ears, for it was strangely true. She was quite right. I did hate him. I knew then that I did. But I had not come to Ireland because of that. When first I had heard that story, I had been indifferent to him—wholly, almost elaborately, indifferent. It was the injustice, the impending tragedy, that had moved me. But now—I hated him. And how had she found that out? Not from anything I had said. I had not shown it there. Then how—?

"You don't say no to that," she went on, impetuously. "Why do you hate him? Oh—I suppose you would not tell me—"; and now all that warm blood of hers was lighted in her veins. If, like those girls along the coast of Lombardy, she had carried a dagger in her garter, I should have found the warm steel of it in my flesh by then. As it was, only her eyes stabbed me, one blow swift after another as you stab the thing you hate.

"So do you think I'm going to listen to a single word you've said? I can hate, and hate more than you. And I hate you for coming to pour those lies into my

ears. If I had seen your face that night on the cliffs when you gave me your letter, I should never have come. I hate to look at you. You're ugly—you couldn't tell the truth."

Words failed her then—they choked in her throat. She tried to speak but could not. The only words were in her eyes, and they were glittering like the sun upon a dancing blade of steel.

"Was it necessary to tell me that?" I asked. "I know it so well."

Perhaps it was the quietness of my voice after the storm of hers—whatever it may have been, her eyes were suddenly dimmed. No longer rapier points were glittering there. In place of them came forth a flood of tears. I stepped quickly to her side, whereupon she looked up at me once more.

"Don't touch me again!" she sobbed, "don't touch me again! And never say another word to me as long as you live. Nothing you have told me makes any difference. I love him better than ever—better than anything in the world."

And as she said this, all I can remember thinking was to bless her heart and wonder from what thrilling book in yellow covers had she learnt her words, her love or hatred.

I could have said it aloud, but that moment she had gone. For an instant, too amazed, I watched her climbing the little narrow pathway up the cliff side and then I hurried after her.

"Let me help you up," said I, imperatively. "You can't get up here alone."

So I climbed before her and stretched down my hand which, without question, she took confidingly in her fingers. And I clasped them, saying nothing. I had touched her once more. It is never wise to let a woman know how human she is.

The moment she reached the level path once more, I found my hand empty. With a sudden movement she had drawn her fingers away and, without a word of good-bye, had turned her face towards Ballysheen.

"Had you better walk back alone?" I asked.

"I came alone," said she, over her shoulder.

"You would rather I did not come with you?"

At first I thought she would not answer that, but suddenly she whipped round, showing me the anger in her eyes once more.

"I shall ask God to-night," she said, "that I shall never see you again."

Against my will that made me smile. She would ask God! Indeed, she was just one of those little creatures who in their loves or hatreds would ask a Deity to help them.

I sat down then by the path's edge. At my side sat Dandy, and together—just as once we had looked after the little nursery maid—we watched Clarissa out of sight. When at last she turned the corner and disappeared, I leant forward, my elbows on my knees, staring at the sea. It was not the sea that filled my eyes. All that I beheld was a picture of Clarissa on her knees, asking God that she should never see me again.

CHAPTER XVIII

It must be by the light of a great confidence in himself that a man rejoices in fatalism. As I walked along the cliffs that morning to meet Clarissa, the beating of my heart was high. For that one hour I had believed in Fate, in the imperishable reason in all things. But as I saw her pass round the distant corner and vanish out of sight, the whole order of the world was plunged in chaos. I began to ask myself what freak of circumstance had sent me out upon such an errand of folly.

By the very movement of her body, the very temper of her step, as I watched her walking back to Ballysheen, I knew that I had awakened in her a living despot of determination.

Women are like that. Nothing will alter them. It proves to me conclusively how little I know of their nature when I brought reason and a spirit of logic along with me to urge Clarissa to the sacrifice of her romance. For it is not with women that they are unreasonable. To be reasonable, one must know what reason is. Now I would swear that, as a sex, they do not know the first meaning of the word. Their intelligence is of another, perhaps a higher,

order altogether. Reason, with a woman, only aggravates her to determination. Intuition, on the other hand, with a man, aggravates him to obstinacy. That is why I think—and maybe I am wrong—that the order of a woman's intelligence is higher than that of a man's. Determination is the better part of obstinacy.

Now I had aggravated Clarissa to determination. In those few moments of her anger she had left all her timidity, all her childlikeness, behind her. So far from increasing the doubt of him, which I know must have been already in her mind, I had in one simple movement—the relation of my story—swept it utterly away. She believed in and loved him then more wholly and completely than she had ever done before, and, as I thought it all out, point by point, along the rigid line of logic, I came to the conclusion that God and my mother had not qualified me for so deft and delicate a business as the meddling with a woman's heart.

"Dandy," said I, presently, "we'd better get back to lunch. We've made hopeless fools of ourselves. Even God, who made woman, knows how to treat them no better than we. Or why did He send that man into her life? It's not losing a woman to see no more of her. We should not have lost, we should have won her, if she'd gone back to Dominica. But we've lost her utterly now. Unless—unless——" the hope of it leapt suddenly into my mind—"unless he never marries her."

It was one of those things too great and generous

in circumstance to count upon. No sooner did it enter my thoughts, than back came the picture of Clarissa—a child by her bedside upon her knees—praying God that she would never see me again; at which, when I had contemplated it for a moment, I rose quickly to my feet.

"Dandy," I said again, "we'd better get back to London." Therefore, taking the tone of my voice, he fell behind disconsolately to my heels and, in silence, we walked back to Ballysheen. Only once did I look round at him. It was when a rabbit scurried across the path in front of us. Then I turned my head.

"Did you see him?" said I.

He stood still and stared up into my face.

"I did," said he, "but I didn't want to."

I know that feeling so well. I was quite aware I had to go back to lunch. God knows I did not want to.

CHAPTER XIX

THERE is something in common between Bellwattle and Dandy. I cannot easily describe it, but I find a strange resemblance. It lies, I think, in their powers of intuition, for whereas Dandy takes the colour of his mood from the subtlest tone of my voice, it is with Bellwattle that she knows my mood before I have so much as uttered a single word.

As I walked up the drive—a broad shingle walk, so called because it enables Quin's car to come immediately to the front door—I was thinking of all that had taken place that morning; trying to justify it in my mind with any reasonable scheme of things however remote. To what purpose had I heard that story in the restaurant? With what object had that poor child of ill-fortune been induced to shelter in the very doorway which I must pass? Or, granting that as reasonable enough, why had she spoken to me—and, speaking, why had she appealed to me for charity? There were many things she might have said, less calculated to catch my sympathy than to ask me for her cab fare home—things at which I should have hurried by rather than hear. But no—she had caught the moment's speculation of my mind

and, out of my conversation with her, had grown the belief that I was meant to save Clarissa from destruction.

Lunch was not yet ready, for I could see Cruikshank still in the garden, wherefore I stood there for some minutes in the drive, trying to puzzle it out, to fit it into some logical order of events upon such lines as you might expect so complicated a matter to be planned. But it would not go. A set of beads there was, a thread too whereon to string them. But with all the wishing in the world, I could not make a pattern bringing the faintest understanding to my mind.

I knew, as truly as the Fate which had brought them together, that nothing but misery and disillusionment could come of Clarissa's union with that boy in London. But I had failed to persuade her to go back to Dominica without him. How utterly I had failed, no one but I, who know how truly I had hoped for it, can ever realise. Then why had the little nursery maid ever induced in me a mood? Why had my mood been played upon by that story in the restaurant? Why had the story been visualised to me by the meeting with that little creature in the doorway? In a word, why, in the name of God, had I come to Ireland at all?

What I can have done as I put that final question to myself, I do not know. Some gesticulation I must have made; some movement which had betrayed my thoughts and the utter despondency of my mind.

Whatever it could have been, I was made suddenly conscious of Bellwattle's voice calling to me from the window of her bedroom.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

I looked up, and found her standing at the window drying her hands.

"What should be the matter?" said I, and I came to take my stand below the window, looking up.

"Why that terrible sigh?" she inquired, "on a day like this?"

"I wasn't aware of it," I replied.

"It's all the worse for that. Is something the matter?"

I tried to read her face. It was not quite inscrutable. I had that irritating sensation of believing I was very near to the knowledge of her thoughts; near, yet far enough away to be utterly unable to translate them. It was almost safe to suppose that she knew I had been to meet Clarissa. But how could she possibly realise all that had happened? So I stood there silent for a moment, waiting while I considered how far I could decoy her from the truth. I did not know then, so well as I know now, that the truth itself is the only thing with which to mislead a woman's intuition. All that lies behind deception she can so easily detect. It is the truth behind the truth which confuses her.

"Is anything the matter?" she repeated, gently; and then I was forced to such strategy as I was capable of. How could I tell her what had happened? God

knows I had been fool enough to try; but my folly, now that I had failed, was not the sort to be softened by sympathy. A fool and his money may soon be parted. It is his folly which clings to him, and not the gentlest fingers in the world can ease him of his load.

"There's nothing the matter," said I. "Perhaps I'm tired. I got up early this morning."

She looked down at me with those generous, straight eyes of hers, and she said: "Then you won't tell me?"

"If there were anything the matter," I began, "I can think of no one——"

I looked up to conclude my sentence, but she had gone. The window was empty. Over a matter of this sort evidently she would waste no time. No doubt she was quite right. My saying that nothing was the matter meant that I had no intention of telling her and, it being only men who throw time away upon curiosity—and that mainly by asking questions—she had let me talk to myself rather than listen to my useless evasions. So, at least, I understood her sudden departure, therefore I, too, turned away, and Cruikshank joined me.

"After lunch," said he, "I shall begin bedding out my stocks."

"After lunch?" said I. "In London they only think up to a meal. I don't think I'll have any lunch at all."

He took me by the arm.

"Appetite going?" he inquired, sympathetically.

I suddenly remembered his surprise at my empty porridge dish, realising that here he imagined he had discovered the first starvation symptoms of an unrequited passion. That was more than I could stand.

"Oh—I'll come and eat with you," said I. "There's nothing the matter with my appetite. Getting up early has given me a headache—that's all."

So we went in to lunch together, when Bellwattle was quite wonderful. No longer did she treat me to her sympathy. Instead, we heard from her some of those wild schemes and fancies which take possession of her mind, I suppose, in such moments as when she gazes into far distances, or in the strange hours of her day when she is alone and talks in animated conversation with herself.

It chanced that Cruikshank spoke of the number of rats in the farmyard over the way.

"They eat everything," said he.

"The creatures!" she exclaimed.

"That's all very well," said Cruikshank, "but when it comes to a whole field of corn being ruined—that's what 'll happen this summer if they're not put down."

"But surely you can stop them?"

"How?" said I.

"Keep the things covered up."

"What do you suggest should be put over a field of corn?" I asked—"A tarpaulin?"

"It 'ud be too heavy," she replied, and then her

quick eye caught the apoplectic tint in Cruikshank's cheek, and her face became full of questions.

"What is it? What is it? Couldn't you cover it up?"

"You could," said I, "but I'd sooner leave it to the rats. What are you going to do about them?" I added, to Cruikshank. "You'll have to have a wholesale slaughter."

His frown to me came too late. I had said it, and Bellwattle was up in arms at once.

"Why should you kill them?" she cried. "Oh, I think it's a shame! They have as much right to live as we have. They must eat! If you don't want them to eat corn they ought to be fed."

"Who's going to stand the expense of that?" we asked.

"The Government," she declared, "the State."

"You'd have to give them old age pensions too," said I. "When you make human paupers they're not content with being fed. They want provision in their old age as well. It 'ud be just the same if you made rodentian paupers."

"What's that?" she asked quickly.

"Paupers," explained Cruikshank, "of that order of creatures to which the rat belongs."

"Well, why doesn't he say so?" she replied.

The fact that I had said so seemed to make no difference. I felt that I had been put in my place; especially when it was Bellwattle herself who changed the subject. She wanted to keep a cow, she said, declaring as the

basis of her suggestion that it was so much nicer having one's own milk.

"But we only have to go fifty yards across to the farm to get it," said Cruikshank.

But that was not her point. I was conceited enough to imagine I knew all that lay in the back of her mind.

"Fifty yards is a long way," said I, "when you like cows for themselves."

She gave me a genuine glance of gratitude.

"And I love cows," said she. "I'd look after it. I'd feed it too. Do let me have one. I'd love to keep a diary."

"Just to record," said I, "what the cow does and thinks. It's quite natural."

"Don't be silly!" said she. "You know I mean a dairy. Cows don't think—do they?"

"Depends on who milks them," said Cruikshank. "The cow that you tampered with might have ideas. And what are we going to do when the milking season's over? Just keep it in the paddock and feed it?"

Her eyes opened wide in amazement.

"Don't they give milk all the year round?" she inquired.

Cruikshank's awkward endeavour to dispel that idea from her mind, and at the same time give no offence, was nearly the nicest thing said during lunch. "It was," he explained, "only when their condition was interesting that they obliged."

"Surely you didn't imagine," he continued, "that

cows were made to give milk to human beings, irrespective of their calves?"

"Well—eggs are eggs," said Bellwattle, conclusively. And as we could not deny it she took it for granted that her supposition about the cows was correct. Logically, no doubt, she is quite right. If eggs will be eggs, it seems on the face of it an error of Nature that cows should not always be cows. The fact that they are not had no power to destroy the line of argument in her mind. She still thought that Cruikshank ought to keep one of those amiable beasts and that she ought to be able to milk it the whole year round.

And so she talked on all through that lunch-time. I could never have dreamed, from the rippling stream of her conversation, that she had ever been curious to know what was the matter with me. But then, when in a sudden silence I announced that I must be drawing my visit to a close her eyes lit up with a burning fire of questions, not one of which she asked. For the moment she was content and clever enough to let Cruikshank interrogate me. At first he refused all hearing of it.

"But you forget," said I, "I can't live on here for ever. Next Friday makes my fifth week."

"It might make your fiftieth," said he. "We don't care."

I laughed. These dear people are too hospitable to know what hospitality means. There is no such thing—or, indeed, should be no such thing—as hospitality. Hospitality is giving within reason. But if there

be reason in it, why call it giving? What is mine cannot be yours within reason, for if there were reason in it, then everything I possess would be my own.

"I'll wait till the end of the week," said I, "then I must get back."

"That's only three days!" they exclaimed in a chorus of disgust.

"It 'll be more than five weeks since I came," said I. "No—I must be off by then."

"Is there anything—?" began Cruikshank, and then Bellwattle interrupted. I could see she did not think it safe to let him continue any longer. In matters of judgment where the heart is concerned, men are not to be relied upon. They thought, no doubt, that I had been disappointed in my little love affair, wherefore, Bellwattle demanded that I should be left to her, and under the table she kicked Cruikshank meaningly upon the ankle. I happen to know that, because it was my ankle which received the blow. When, then, he took no notice of her signal, she came to the conclusion that as a race, men were the most obtuse animals God ever thought of, and rising from the table she asked me to smoke a cigarette with her in the garden.

"What are you going to do with me?" said I.

She made no answer till we came to the little nut walk at the bottom of the garden. Then she turned and looked me in the face.

"Is this decision unalterable?" she asked.

I nodded my head.

"When you're miserable do you always want to go and be alone?"

In the tone of her voice I felt the shadow of what was coming. She was going to make this the last and most determined bid for my confidence. I was no less determined to tell her nothing. What good could it do? There may be a certain beauty in sympathy which makes any abasement worth while, but so far as I am concerned it is a quality in human beings I have done without for so long, that a childish sense of dignity has double its value to me.

Now it would have been most undignified to tell any one of the folly of my adventure, or to seek to gain their sympathy because it had failed. The real tragedy of failure is not its want of success; it is the knowledge that you may not tell it to a soul. Therefore, I said boldly that I was quite happy, and not so far below my breath as that she might not hear, I hummed the catchy fragment of a tune.

"Then, why are you suddenly going?"

"Because," said I, "there is a difference between a visit and an infliction. I want to be asked again. I don't want to stay on until you really will be glad to see the last of me."

"Why do you talk nonsense to me?" she inquired. "Do you think I forget things? Do you think I've forgotten what you said to me on the cliffs that day we went to see the cottage?"

"What did I say?"

"'It's not good for man to live alone.' I don't

know whether you invented it yourself, but you said it."

"No—that's not mine."

"But you said it?"

"Oh—yes."

"Then, why are you going back to London and leaving us?"

I looked all round the garden and, upon my soul, for the moment I wondered why the deuce I was doing it myself. There was the arabis in blossom, the deep purple tulips, with strong, straight shafts of green, were standing in their rows in orderly array, as though a Roman emperor were passing down their lines. The faint breath of a wandering breeze just caught them and, as they bowed, I heard the sound of distant music in the emperor's train. But that was only fancy, and it was not for a fancy alone that I marvelled at myself or wondered how I could bring myself to leave it. There was the whole breadth and length of the sea, the whole vast arena of the sky, the great sweep of the cliffs, which no line of purple tulips could compass, with which no snow of arabis could compare. And for the cramped spaces in a city, no matter how immense, I was going to leave it all—all consciousness of freedom, all remembrance of my heritage of life—just that I might pursue that bitter pleasure of forgetfulness.

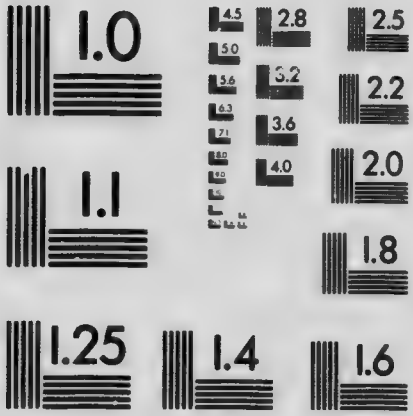
"Don't ask me," said I. "I suppose when they say that you hear London calling to you, there's something in it. It has a voice—you can't deny it."

"Yes—and who was it who didn't put wax in his



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ears, but got his men to tie him up so he could hear the women singing ? "

" It was Ulysses," said I; " but it doesn't apply in my case. The song of London after this is a raucous melody to me. It's here the voices sing."

Her eyes were full of tenderness as she looked at me. I was getting my sympathy after all, and that without any expenditure of my childish dignity. Oh—women are generous creatures ! If they cannot make a bargain with their hearts, then they offer them in both hands—and for nothing.

When I saw that look, I had the audacity to take her hand.

" Don't ask me anything more," said I, " let me put the wax in my ears and get back to my little theatres. I shall be happy enough when I take my seat once more in the Park and see the play begin. Next year perhaps I'll come back for a week or two, when there are not so many fish as we've caught in the last few weeks."

I said that for her to laugh at, but she did not even smile. Instead, she took her hand away from mine and her lips set firmly in determination.

" Very well," said she, " tell me nothing. It's not the way to treat a woman when she really wants to know. But you'll learn that as you get older."

" I shall never learn anything about women," said I.

She shrugged her shoulders and began to walk back to the house.

" Was that a threat ? " I called after her.

"It was whatever you'll find it," said she.

I ran down the path and caught her up.

"What do you mean?" I asked. "What are you going to do?"

"You don't understand my tone of voice, I suppose?" she replied.

I admitted I did not, whereupon she made a statement that I shall carry back with me to London and remember for the rest of my days.

"Every woman," said she, "has her little idios-an-crazes"; and she walked on into the house.

CHAPTER XX

For a little while that afternoon I watched Cruikshank bedding out his stocks. He has evidently been warned to be very careful what he says about my going. I gather that from the fact that he leaves the subject severely alone. It shows a discretion on his part which, while it may be the better part of valour, has an irritating way of defeating its own ends. I can imagine all they have been saying about Clarissa and myself, while Cruikshank, hiding his head under the sand of silence, is patting himself on the back in the belief that I cannot see all he knows.

It was thinking of this hidden head of his that made me ask him did his back not ache over the labours of a garden.

"When I began," said he, "I used to think I was an old man. I don't notice it now."

After a pause, during which he never stopped working, I inquired when the stocks would blossom.

"Late June—July—August—part of September."

It was saying just as little as he could, and I am not surprised, for all true gardeners hate interruption. It was saying so little, but, my heavens! it was saying so much. Late June—July—August—part of September.

What abundant, what extravagant generosity! The only other living things in the world as generous as that are women.

"Do you remember walking round the Quad," said I, "and talking about women?"

He looked up quickly over his shoulder. Of course, the question was a startling one to him. He had not followed my train of thought.

"Why? Why?" he repeated.

I turned away on my heel.

"Why? Oh—I don't know. We thought we knew so much about them, didn't we? All of us begin as teachers in the temple, and the best of us end by being clowns in a booth."

I looked back at him once as I passed out of the garden. He was standing up, with the tiny root of a stock in his hand, and his face was a picture of bewilderment.

Before I had decided upon any direction to follow, I found myself down by the long, low curve of strand marking the bend of the bay of Ballysheen. From the first moment that I saw it, it reminded me of Browning's "Night and Morning":

> A m[illegible] warm sea-scented beach,
> Two [illegible]ds to cross till a farm appears.

For there is the mile of sand as though it had been measured to his pen. There, too, are the low-lying fields and the long white farmhouse with its roof of thatch. Whenever they put their lamp in those farm-

house windows as th . vening light draws in, I think as well of "the quick blue spurt of a match," of the "two hearts beating each to each."

The farm belongs to one named Power, whose land, some fifty acres of pasture fields and corn, stretches inland behind and around the house. It was there, through all his fields, I wandered, letting my feet take me as they wished. It seemed I had no intention left in all the world, except that I was determined upon one thing. I would not return to the house to tea. They might suppose what they liked about my appetite, but I could bear no longer the thought of keeping silent to the generous inquisition of Bellwattle's desire for my confidence. There were all the reasons in the world, I know, why I should tell her everything; but that fear in me of being thought a fool, added to the knowledge of that which she had already told Cruikshank, would be more than I could stand. Of course, she would think me a fool. Any woman would think so of a man who undertakes knight-errantry with such equipment as is mine.

When, therefore, it came to tea-time, I sat down behind a tree of hawthorn, white with blossom, just looking into the heart of the country which I knew I should not see again for many a month to come.

It was then as I sat there, that I saw the figure of General Ffrench approaching. Another instant and Dandy would have been alongside of him, master at once of those ceremoni . of friendly overture which

he knows so well how to conduct. My hand upon his collar came not a moment too soon.

"Lie down, you young devil!" said I, below my breath, for the old gentleman was following a beaten track through the field from which, if he did but continue it, I should escape his notice. For four weeks I had avoided hearing of the old queen's reception in Dublin, and it was not in my mind to listen to it then. So I held Dandy severely by the collar and he passed us by. It was not the sort of treatment Dandy appreciated. He has a passionate curiosity about human beings. Never a man can pass along a lonely road but what he must go and speak to him. He sniffs in a tentative way at his legs and then, if satisfied, drops his voice to a confidential whisper, whereupon the man always turns and looks at me with a kindly smile in his eyes, which vanishes no sooner than he properly has sight of me. I suspect it is that Dandy is endeavouring to persuade him what a splendid fellow I am, which, apparently, he has every good intention to believe, until he turns to find me as I am.

When, then, Dandy found himself a prisoner, compelled to watch this strange two-legged creature go by without any of his customary amenities, he twisted his head first this way and then that, till I thought he would wring his own neck in his collar.

"Keep still, you little fool!" I whispered.

He looked back piteously over his shoulder into my face.

"It's a man," he whined.

"I know that," said I.

"But he's got a gun."

"He's only got one cartridge," I replied with triumph. "You watch him."

And we watched—Dandy breathlessly, I, with that calm confidence born of a superior knowledge. It was Dandy who expected him to raise his gun at the slightest provocation and blow the very heavens to pieces, when, collar or no collar, he would have been off into the fields, dancing here, there and everywhere without the faintest conception of what he was doing. But I knew better than that. The old gentleman moved slowly and stealthily, as one who is following the subtle and intricate workings of a trail. Just to see him made me think of the days at school with a Latin grammar outside the desk and the story of Sioux Indians within. To manipulate the reading of the one with an apparently engrossing study of the other, is no mean feat. First, your face assumes that consternation which comes with the sudden remembrance that you have forgotten something—up goes the flap of the desk—but what does it matter? It was all so very long ago. I don't suppose I could do it now for five minutes without immediate discovery. It was of a Sioux Indian, anyhow, that the old general reminded me. He had that way of walking. There was just that watchful poise of the head. You might have thought, to see him, that he was close upon the tracks of a giant grizzly instead of some poor little rabbit, which must sit up motionless for at least a minute before he would consent to shoot.

It was the sight of this old man, sparing and ever sparing his last cartridge, that made me feel the poverty of Ireland more than any roofless cottage or empty mill. I compared it for the instant with the men at Monte Carlo, blazing away their cartridges at the frightened pigeons, jerking the empty cases with easy callousness on to the ground. I had no doubt this old fellow would take home his empty case and keep it on a shelf in some lumber cupboard, looking at it reminiscently from time to time, rejoicing in the remembrance of the many days of sport it had brought him. You may be sure this was not the first time he had come out with that cartridge which the money for those tomatoes had acquired for him. I can imagine there is plenty of sport in such a case without firing a single shot.

He certainly found enough to keep him alert that afternoon. Times out of number he raised the gun swiftly to his shoulder. There were three breathless moments when he steadied himself as he took aim; but either it was that the rabbit did not sit still long enough, or he knew that he had lost that cunning of his younger days; whatever it was, the world was quite still; the heavens were not blown to pieces. He never fired once.

For an hour I think I must have sat under that hawthorn bush with the everlasting expectation of a sudden thunder of sound. It never came. And then, as I rose to my feet to return home, he appeared once more in sight. This time he saw me. There was no escaping him then. Dandy rushed back to meet

him; sniffed suspiciously at the barrel of his gun; asked him in as many words all about it. On this occasion, I imagine he said not a single word about me.

"Any sport?" I asked, as he came up with me.

He shook his head.

"Not a single rabbit anywhere," said he.

You see, everybody has his little sense of dignity. I am not alone in the possession of it when I will not tell Bellwattle what a fool I have been. Four times at least before he had passed out of sight I had seen him raise his gun to his shoulder, ready to fire at a rabbit sitting peacefully within twenty yards of him. Then, without a blush to his face, he assures me he has not seen one. But this is the common instinct of a man. He will not be thought a fool. God alone knows how completely he may be one.

"I'm glad to find," said I, "that you're not one of those men who blaze away for the mere sake of shooting."

He took my arm at that.

"You noticed I didn't fire a shot?" said he.

"I should have heard it," said I, "if you had."

"I think," said he, "without flattering myself, that I'm one of those men who has an unusual amount of self-control."

But the moment he had said it, Fate played her pranks with him. There came a rabbit out from the undergrowth to sit blandly on the beaten track in front of us. Up went his gun.

"Keep still!" he muttered, in a horrible whisper.

And then, whether it were by mistake that his finger pulled the trigger or, happening on some odd chance, he thought he had found the sight at once, however it was, he fired. Immediately the rabbit darted back into the undergrowth, and Dandy leapt forward, barking and jumping wildly as though he were responsible for the whole affair. The poor old gentleman blew the smoke disconsolately down the barrel of his gun.

"Must have hit him," said he, "but I can't understand how the deuce he got away."

So firmly, moreover, did he believe it that he tried to set Dandy searching for the poor little beast.

"Fetch him! Fetch him!" said he, and Dandy jumped around from one rabbit-hole to another till he almost made me giddy.

"It was not an easy shot," said I, for I must confess I felt sorry for him. I knew he would never have fired that last cartridge had it not been for me.

"No, it was not easy," he agreed. "I had to be very quick," and then, sorrowfully, he took out the empty cartridge-case. I watched him secretly as he slipped it into the pocket of his coat.

We walked on together up to the village, and all the time, as I knew to be inevitable, he entertained me with his story of the old queen's reception in Dublin. At his own gate we parted, though to this day I scarcely know how I escaped. His desire that I should meet his sister, Mrs. Quigley, was expressed in such inordinate terms of flattery as to make my

refusal tantamount to an insult. It was only the fixed determination in my mind to see Clarissa's prison once more before I left Ballysheen that made me adamant.

Why this determination had come to me is more than I can explain. I wanted to catch a last glimpse of her between those white muslin curtains to assure myself perhaps that, complete as my failure may have been, I had not shirked the duty which an unreasonable Destiny had so plainly pointed out to me. I had done my best; moreover, there was yet the slender hope that the wisdom of my words might plant a seed of doubt within her. She might yet refuse to marry him.

But there was a bitterness in that hope for me. If such an event did happen, she would never come to me in gratitude. And it is gratitude from a woman, I think, which makes a deal of difference in the colour of the world. For that I had envied my electrician, because, when he gave the little nursery maid his narcissus, she must have said "Thank you." In the same way it is not because I have the faintest shadow of an idea as to how a woman should be dressed, that I would like to clothe her from head to foot. It is to see her strutting before a glass like some peacock on a garden wall, to catch the gleam of perky pleasure in her eye; it is to see her suddenly turn the last of all her peacock little thoughts to you, to hear the sudden rustle of the skirt you have bought, to feel her hand in the glove that you have paid for laid swiftly on

your arm and then to hear the voice which only God and a great heart can give her, saying, "You dear old thing, and I'd nearly forgotten to thank you."

I believe she always does forget, just at first. And judging by the men whose faces at such moments I have watched, it must be so much nicer that way. She would not be human if she remembered straight away.

All such gratitude as this then from Clarissa I had lost. Through the dim light behind those white muslin curtains, the utmost I could imagine of her was that she was down upon her knees, praying God that she might never see me again. And when I did reach the house, it was just this picture and no other that my mind painted for me.

Why had I come into her life? But I did not put it that way. I asked myself why she had come into mine. And what is more, I knew that I could answer it. It was because of the terrible loneliness which hemmed her in on every side. That it was which had made its appeal to me. She was more beset with the utter solitude of life even than I. I at least had Dandy. There was Moxon, too, who, if it came to such a pass, would willingly serve me for nothing rather than leave me to myself. But this poor child had no one, and as I gazed up at the cheerless window staring out across the sea I felt that, were it given to me—disfigured as I am—I could bring her nearer to that mysterious secret of content which needs no qualities of possession to make it clear.

"But that," said I to myself, "is the talk of a child."

"Out of the mouths of babes——" began an urgent voice within me.

"That," said I, emphatically and aloud, "is the talk of a child." To which the voice within me had no more to say.

It was at this moment that I turned away and simultaneously saw the figure of Bellwattle emerge from the front door, hurrying away towards home.

In a dozen steps I had come up with her. Suspicion was working quickly in my mind.

"What have you been doing in there?" I asked.

"Seeing the Miss Fennells," she replied, promptly.

"The Miss Fennells," said I, "are in Youghal, and will not return till late this evening."

"Why did you ask, then?" she replied, and there was the suggestion in her voice that it was I who should be blamed for leading her to tell the lie.

"I asked," said I, "because I wanted to know."

"When you tell a person nothing yourself," she answered, "that's the very worst reason you could have," and after that I could get her to say no more.

CHAPTER XXI

I AM consumed with the belief that something has happened. On the assumption of her instinct alone Bellwattle has taken matters into her own hands. Her visit of the evening before last to the Miss Fennells' house had for its intention a talk with Clarissa. Whether she saw her or not I cannot rightly guess. Somehow it would seem that she did.

After breakfast yesterday morning she called me out into the garden and begged me to stay over the week-end till Tuesday or Wednesday at least. No sooner had she made this request than I turned and faced her.

"Why?" I asked.

"Because we want you to."

"You've said you wanted me to stay an indefinite length of time. But why Tuesday or Wednesday?"

A distressful look came into her eyes as she sought for inspiration to give me answer.

"Must you always have a woman's reason before you grant the favour she is asking?"

"It's a good policy," said I.

"Yes—but what's the good of being political with a woman?"

"It needs more than politics," said I, smiling, "if one's going to get the better of her. Can't you tell me why you want me to stay?"

"No—I can't."

"Well, now, that's a reasonable answer," I replied, "for now I know."

"You can know as much as you like if you stay until Wednesday, and then I'll tell you how wrong you were."

So I have agreed, and here it is Sunday morning. As far as is possible I know it has something to do with Clarissa. Beyond that I am absolutely in the dark.

At about eleven o'clock Bellwattle asked me to come out with her for the last time to see the cottage in the hollow, and as we walked up the boreen on our way to the cliff I determined, at the expense even of my honour, to try and surprise her into the truth.

"Being a woman," said I, suddenly, "you really have a greater sense of honour than I have as a man."

She glanced at me oddly with that one suspecting eye.

"You don't think that," she said.

"I'm going to prove it," said I. "I'm going to betray a confidence which was betrayed to me, if you will promise not to turn round and betray my confidence in you."

"Say that all again," she asked.

I repeated it, slowly and simply, word for word.

"And you expect me to keep my promise of secrecy when you and somebody else have broken yours?"

" If you make the promise," said I, " yes. I've said that, being a woman, you have a greater sense of honour than I. I'm going to prove that I believe it, by putting myself in your hands."

She gazed steadily in front of her. The charm was working well. I could see it in her eyes. After accepting that, there is not a woman in the world who would have given me away.

" Go on," she said, at length.

I paused for a moment to let my words get weight, and then, suddenly, I had it out.

" Why did you tell Cruikshank," I asked, " that I was coming to live in the cottage next year ? "

She knew she was in a corner, and she sought to gain time.

" When did he tell you that ? " she inquired.

" Some little while ago in the garden. Only after he'd mentioned it did he remember that you had told him not to speak of it. Had he wilfully broken the confidence I shouldn't have said anything about it. But no blame can attach itself to him, and I want to know."

She looked at me for a long time before she answered, after which there came from her one of those little flashes of wisdom wherewith at moments she surprises you so much.

" When a woman hopes for a thing very much," she answered, " she always says that it is going to be. Every woman can bear disappointment. She has to bear it all her life. But you kill her when you take

away hope. Men always say the reverse, because they know they can never bear the disappointment. That's the sort of reason why I told Cruikshank you were coming here next year."

That was all the success I got out of my surprising her, an expression of sympathy and appreciation for myself so delicately conveyed that it robbed me of all power to wonder whether it were the truth. She wanted me to come and live there. I wondered then if, when I got back to London, she would accept from me the present of one of those Victorian sun-bonnets to wear when she walks about on these cliffs. On the spur of the moment I asked her.

She laughed out loud, and said I was the oddest man she had ever met. It did not seem so odd to me.

"Will you let me send you one?" said I.

"Of course."

"And you'll wear it?"

"I shall love it."

"Then, when I come next summer," said I, "I shall see you in it."

We were laughing about it after we had reached the cliffs when suddenly there came the figure of a man along the winding path. He was alone, and even though I knew but few of the people in Ballysheen by sight there seemed to me something familiar in his presence there.

"Who's this?" I asked.

She shook her head.

"I've never seen him before," she replied.

But as he came nearer a memory seemed to quiver in my mind. I had seen him. But where? Where? It was as he passed us in silence that I remembered. For in that moment his eyes looked with recognition into mine. In the flash of that moment it all came back. In the restaurant—that night at supper—talking to that woman over their coffee and liqueur—Clarissa's lover—the man I had come to hate.

"My God!" I muttered, when he had gone by, and as I looked up into Pellwattle's face her cheeks were quite white.

CHAPTER XXII

On Sunday it is Cruikshank's custom to rest from his labours in the garden. The custom is not one of hypocrisy. He does it, not that he may be seen of others, but, as I fully believe, because there is a depth of religious sentiment within him, which one would never suspect. This does not absolutely deter him from those little attentions to his flowers and his rose trees which no gardener, however religious his scruples may be, would ever describe as work. That knife with the handle of horn is for ever within reach in the pocket of his coat—a little tangle of bass is always ready to hand should a drooping plant or an overweighted stem demand it, and with these little accessories before the fact, he wanders up and down his garden paths, his mind in such spirit of contentment as I would give my forty years of idleness to possess.

"It's the number seven I like," he says. "I like the idea of an omnipotent power moulding a massive world, hammering and chiselling it, never allowing it a moment of stillness in which to set, keeping it always moving, always in the making for six mighty ages and then, upon the seventh, with tired hands,

leaving it to its well-earned rest. The Sabbath in its relation to dogma means very little indeed. It's what it means in its relation to work that I like. It can't honour God that, for one day in the week we do nothing. What honours Him is the work we have done in the six which makes the seventh of necessity a day of rest."

And as he says all this, Bellwattle watches him with admiring eyes. I think she marvels a little at his accurate use of the big words. She would like herself to be able to say—omnipotent—and to say it as he does in the right place. Wherefore when he has finished, she turns to me with a gentle expression that expects my approval.

"I think he's quite right, don't you?" she asks.

Whereupon I bend my head and Cruikshank moves away down the herbaceous border, with an end of bass sticking out of the corner of his pocket.

"What does the Rector say about these opinions?" I asked her one Sunday.

"I don't think he understands them," she replied. "Cruikshank did say something about it once and the Rector jumped down his throat. 'My dear Townshend,' he said, 'if everybody held your views, we shouldn't be able to keep a church open. Everybody would be doing just what they liked on Sundays.'"

"And what did Cruikshank say?"

"He asked him whether he thought it was better to make them do the things they didn't like."

"And the Rector?"

"He never said another word. He went straight back to the—what do you call it?—the Rectory or the Victory?"

"In this case," said I, "not being the victor, you call it the Rectory."

"Well, that's where he went," said she.

My last Sunday in Ballysheen was no different to the rest, no different unless I count as an integral part of it the news that was brought to us that day.

Every moment since our meeting with Clarissa's lover on the cliffs, I had been working my mind to arrive at some understanding of his coming to Ballysheen. From the look in Bellwattle's face as we passed him, I felt assured that she knew who it was and, instinctive though her knowledge must have been, I could not but feel she had some ground for her belief. It was no difficult step from such assumption to connect her knowledge with that visit which she had paid to the Miss Fennells' house. Had she then seen Clarissa? Had Clarissa told her he was coming? But if she had known so surely as that, why was her face so white? The sight of him had startled her. Why should it, if she had known?

I determined that Sunday afternoon to make an end of mystery and question her myself.

In the morning it had been raining—those sudden intermittent showers which April lends to May, when the great clouds roll up the blue highways like the dust of a vast army on its march. From the window in his little study whose walls are lined with books

that talk of gardens the great gardeners have made, Cruikshank watched each shower with the happy delight of a child. Then, as the rain drops began their gentle kettle-drumming on the pane, he would look round.

"This is fine—we wanted this badly."

"It'll make tea out of doors impossible," said Bellwattle.

But Cruikshank shook his head.

"It'll have cleared off by lunch-time," he replied. And he was right. As we sat down to lunch, the bright white sun, looking as though the passage of those clouds had burnished it, rolled out into the strip of blue which so anxiously I had been stitching into Dutchmen's trousers all the morning. When the meal was over, we walked out into the garden.

There is such colour in Ireland after rain, as you will never see in any other country in the world. Blues, purples and greens, deep as the dyes they knew of in Tyre and Sidon, spread far away into every distance that your eyes can find. Across the Bay of Ballysheen, as we stood there then, the purple cliffs of Helvic Head sank nobly down into a sea of emerald. On the far horizon rose the misty mountains, blue as the light of moonstones in the sun.

"And this is what I am going to leave behind," said I.

Cruikshank laid a hand affectionately on my shoulder.

"You've only to say the word and I'll get Tierny

to go up to the cottage in the hollow to-morrow morning."

I shook my head and tried to laugh. It was so like his goodness, and seemed so impossible to me then. So he turned away and strolled down by the beds where by now his Lady Grizels and his Young Lord Nelsons are no longer babies together in their kindergarten, but young women and young men with all the summer of life stretched out before them.

"So you've really made up your mind?" said Bellwattle.

"I'm afraid so," I replied. "I don't think you know what it is to be alone." I waited then to get a pause, and after it I turned to her suddenly and said, "Did you know who that man was we passed yesterday?"

"No," she replied, nervously. "Who?"

"Clarissa's lover—the man she's going to marry."

"Are you sure?"

"Absolutely."

"How do you know she's going to marry him?"

"For that matter," said I, "what do you know about it at all?"

It was then she told me everything. For this had been the meaning of her visit to Clarissa. It seems on that day when I had returned from the cliffs, that my failure had been written in my face. She assured me she had read it there. And so, when I announced that I must bring my visit to a close, she made certain in her mind of all that had taken place. But it is not

only that a woman has instincts in these matters; she acts upon them.

"Upon a slender thread like that," said I, "you go to see Clarissa?"

"Why not? I knew I was right."

"You knew you were right? Without asking me for proof of it?"

"Proof doesn't help," she replied. "It doesn't make things any more real."

And in that one sentence I received a clearer view into the subtle reasoning of a woman's intuition; for reasoning there is in it, an unconscious reasoning from impressions rather than facts, whereby she needs no proof and shuns the sharp edges of a fact lest they should destroy the sensitive surface of her mind.

"So you go straight to Clarissa?" said I.

"It's never any good saying anything to a man," she answered. "I could hear in your voice, when you said you were going back to London, that you had made up your mind. Talking won't do any good to a man when he's got as far as that. I went to Clarissa."

"Where you found that all your suppositions had been wrong. You found that I had never met her before. You found that I am not in love with her. You found that she hates the very sight of me. Weren't you surprised?"

"Not a bit," said she.

Now what is the good of one illuminating sentence against an answer so complex and incomprehensible as this? As surely as a woman gives you the key to

her nature, so surely will you find the barrel of it stuffed with wax. She had learnt that she was wrong on every point and she was not surprised.

"You expected, then, to have all your beliefs dashed to the ground?" I said. "You knew, when you thought I was in love, that you would find you were mistaken?"

"No, I didn't."

Then why no surprise to find you were—all at sea?"

"But I didn't find that. I didn't find I was mistaken. I found I was right. One thing did surprise me—I must admit that. I thought you must have met her before. But I quite expected to find that you were in love with her and that she hated you. So why should I be surprised?"

"My God!" said I, "can't you talk seriously about a matter like this? You know the truth now—you know just how much of a fool I've been. Why go on talking about my being in love with Clarissa? It's ridiculous. I'm not a romantic little boy. You must know how useless it would be for me to let myself drift into an affection for any woman. Women take no violent fancies for me. I don't blame 'em. So for Heaven's sake, when I go and make a fool of myself on a woman's behalf, don't imagine that I'm in love with her. What did you do? When you'd found everything as you say you'd expected it—what did you do?"

She sat down on the seat beneath the nut trees and she motioned to me to sit beside her.

"I gave her my advice," said she.

"What was that?"

"I believed that every word you'd said about him was true."

"More than true," said I.

"So I told her what to do. I told her to write to him."

"Saying what?"

"Saying that she could not wait for him any longer; that if he did not come and marry her at once, she would go straight back to Dominica."

"My God!" said I, "and he's come!"

"I know, but that doesn't mean he is going to marry her."

At that moment I felt almost contemptuous of her intelligence. I knew what folly she had done.

"When a man is after a woman's money," said I, "he's said good-bye to the faintest sense of honour. He'll marry her right enough. She wrote, of course?"

"She said she would."

"Did she say anything about me?"

"Nothing at first."

"But she said something?"

"Yes—she wanted to know why you had come all that way to tell her what you did."

"Well——"

"I told her it was because you were different to every other man I had ever met except one."

"Who?"

"Cruikshank."

"What do you mean?"

"What I say. I believe Cruikshank would have done the same before he married me."

I laughed—bitterly.

"There's no more resemblance between Cruikshank and me," said I, "than between a Chinee and a Red Indian. We're at opposite poles. At the 'varsity he was mathematics, I was classics. There's the difference in a nutshell."

"We won't argue it," she replied. "I know what I mean and that's what I told her. She asked me if you had not done it out of spite."

"What did you say then?"

"I just took her little face in my hands and I kissed her—she is so pretty to kiss."

And then Bellwattle paused.

"Yes—yes——" said I—that pause frightened me. I wanted her to finish her sentence.

"I kissed her," she repeated, "and I told her that when she was a little older she'd know that there are only three things that make a man move out of a spot where he's comfortable."

"You're a clever——" and then I stopped. I remembered how the word "woman" had silenced her once before. "Go on," said I; "what are they?"

"Work—fresh air—adventure."

Now there is a lot of sense in that. I know a man who would have said, "Wine—women and horses." And not only would he have thought it sounded well, but he would have believed it to be true.

"Did you convince her?" I asked.

"I don't know. One never can know. A woman's convictions are things that grow in the dark. She never knows whether they have blossomed until she suddenly has to take them out in the light. I told her that you were the best friend she could possibly have. I told her where you lived in London—that you lived all alone with your dog—I told her——"

"Good Lord! You didn't tell her I was in love with her!"

"No—of course, I didn't. Because you're not."

"What then?"

"I told her that if ever she was in trouble she was to go to you."

"You think she will go to London then?"

"No."

"Then why did you say that?"

"To show her that I expected she would. I don't know women who do what you expect them to."

I was just about to laugh at that, when the gate upon the drive opened, and through the golden hedge of barberry we saw the Miss Fennells walk up towards the house.

"What have they come for?" I asked.

"They often come on Sunday afternoons," she replied, easily. "They won't stay long—you needn't be afraid. They have to drink five other cups of tea at five other different houses."

A moment later came the tea with the Miss Fennells demurely following.

"It almost looks as if they'd brought it with them," said I.

They came on chance, they said, but the tea belied them. I saw Cruikshank raise his head, like the guardian of a herd, as he caught the sound of their voices, then on tip-toe he crept through an opening in the hedge that gives access to a path leading to the farmyard. I suppose he had tea with the farmer. He never appeared again till they had gone.

It was as they rose to leave that Miss Teresa held out her hand, and said: "I wish you could have met our nephew, Mr. Bellairs. It would be so nice for you to know each other in London. I would have told him to look you up there, but I didn't know your address."

I thanked Heaven from the bottom of my heart that she did not. It would be difficult to know the best thing to do with that young man if he came round to Mount Street.

"Where does he live in London?" I asked, politely.

She gave me the address of his rooms in Chelsea, and I made a mental note of it.

"He's gone already, then?" said I, with a wild hope rising in me.

"Oh, yes—he went yesterday with Miss Fawdry. They're to be married from my sister's house in London directly they get over."

There may have been more said than that before they actually departed. I cannot recall a word of it, for after that I knew my failure was complete. She had

gone to learn the bitter lesson of forgetfulness, and I was powerless to help her now.

"You needn't come to the gate," whispered Bellwattle in my ear; so when I had shaken hands with them I sat down again on the seat under the nut trees trying to see one faint glimmer of hope where there was none.

It was then, as ever he does when life is offering me of its blackest, that Dandy came and, sitting down at my feet, stared, full of comprehension, into my face.

"Well, old fella," said I, "she's gone. It's all over. It was never suggested—where all these things are arranged—it was never suggested that I should help a woman in distress. They won't take it from me—they don't think I'm quite capable of telling the truth because I'm so damned ugly."

Why he did it then I cannot for the life of me understand; but he repeated a trick that I had taught him when he was a wild, young puppy all energy and no manners—a trick he had never taken to because it hurt his dignity. When he found that he could get all he wanted in life without it he gave it up. I had not seen him do it for two years or more; but he did it then.

"I'm so damned ugly," I repeated.

Whereupon he sat up on his hind paws and begged.

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

SUMMER and autumn both have come, both have gone. It is nearly two months since I saw the last leaf fall from the plane tree beneath which I sit so often in the Park, whose canopy of foliage is the roof of one of my little theatres. I cannot remember ever having realised the passing of a season so actually as I did that day when this poor, dead, shrivelled thing, which once had worn its glossy green, came fluttering down into the mud. I watched it as it circled and twisted. It was like the feeble flight of one of those tired butterflies which have hibernated in some sheltered place until the first treacherous day of sunshine has brought them forth to buffet and destroy them. It was so much at the mercy of the faintest wind that blew. As it lay there in the mud, I looked above me at the blackened branches. It had been the last leaf to fall. Both summer and autumn had gone. A few minutes later there passed by one who, unthinkingly, crushed it beneath his foot, and with that it reverted to the dust once more from which originally it had come—into which inevitably it was destined to return.

I remembered then that I got up from my seat and

walked slowly from the Park. As I passed out of the gates and turned towards Piccadilly, they were beginning to light up in the windows of the clubs. I chose the opposite pavement, looking up into the different windows as I went by. Every one of them offered the same picture—men of ease and leisure, reading their evening papers over cups of tea. I wondered what would be their replies if, into each room, I had walked announcing that I had just seen the last leaf fall from the plane trees in the Park. In my mind's eye I could see them, one and all, looking at me in disgust for bringing such news, then burying themselves again in their papers, goading their minds to forgetfulness by reading the latest report of whatever sensation the moment had to offer them.

"Perhaps I'm the only man in London," I said to myself, "who knows that this is the very last day of autumn"; and then, as I thought shudderingly of the long winter and the lightless fogs before us, I suddenly remembered Bellwattle's words:

"There is no winter."

What a philosophy to be able to believe that.

But now the real tragedy had come to me. It was not that I was unable to believe there is no winter; it had come to me by this that I could not but remember there was. That little trick of forgetfulness, whereby you close the eyes of all consciousness, turning your night into day, the cunning of that had gone from me since I had been in Ireland. My supper-room, with its bright lights and its suggestive music, had no

longer in its finger-bowls the waters of Lethe. I could only remember that it was winter outside, that people were cold and hungry, that in the hidden places of this great city there were those who had neither fire nor food to warm them.

How I lived through those two months since that last leaf fell from my plane tree I scarcely know. Depression came regularly to me every day, as though I had entered her into my service. She slipped into the room with Moxon and Dandy in the morning when they brought me my tea and then, while it grew lukewarm in the pot, I would lie staring out of the window into the grey light of the ill-weaned morning, thinking of that day when with such hope in my heart I had set out to meet Clarissa, when with such bitter knowledge of my folly I had returned.

Now, however, it is January. The days truly seem no longer, though we have passed that shortest day in December, when Hope, like a freshening bud, begins to swell again. I have not felt it swelling within me, yet I do my best to drive depression away.

I have bought window-boxes for all my windows, and this morning went down with Dandy to Covent Garden to purchase bulbs for the early spring. Snowdrops and crocuses they tell me are the first to flower. As if I did not know! Though possibly they were quite right to say it. There may be many here who are so sadly ignorant.

I asked the man who stands under that awning, where all the little boxes of tiny seedlings are ranged,

tier upon tier, I asked him at what time of the year should I sow sweet peas.

I had a sudden fancy to see my own Lady Grizel in their bright green pinafores, growing up with their Young Lord Nelsons in a kindergarten of my own making.

"I suppose they ought to be sown soon?" I asked.

"'Ave yer got a light?" he asked.

"As much as there is these days," said I.

Then we stared at each other, for by his look I felt I had not understood, and by my words he made certain I had not.

Presently he tried me again.

"'Ave yer got a light?"

"Now what do you mean?" said I. "I've got boxes outside my window. There's as much light there as you'll get anywhere."

His look was not contemptuous, but it hurt me as if it were.

"A light," said he, slowly, "is a large box with lights to it—like a small green'ouse it is, for to force plants in. Open the lights in the daytime and they gets all the air they want. Close 'em at night and they don't get no frosts."

I understood at once; but had he said frames, I think I should have known sooner.

"Well, of course, I haven't got any," said I. "If I had I should have no place to put them in. I've just got a few window-boxes—that's all."

I think he did look at me contemptuously then. If

he had had the seeds of sweet peas to sell he might have been more considerate, but dealing in no other plants save bulbs, he lost nothing by setting me to rights.

"'Ave yer ever tried growin' sweet peas in London?" he asked, "growin' 'em in winder-boxes?"

"If I had," said I, "should I come and ask you when to plant them?"

He took no notice of my excellent reasoning. The smile of pity for my ignorance still lingered in his face.

"Well, you try," he continued. "See if yer can get 'em a foot 'igh—an' if there's a blossom on 'em, bring it ter me an' I'll give yer sixpence for it as a curiosity."

"You shouldn't throw your money about like that," said I. "It's extravagant of you. But I hope I shouldn't take advantage of it. You may see my blossom of sweet pea. In fact, I'll bring it down to you; but I wouldn't deprive you of your sixpence for the world."

At that he got cross. I was annoyed myself. It is one thing to be made aware of your ignorance and quite another to have it thrown back in your face. He knew by the tone in my voice that he had irritated me, thereby losing a possible customer. No doubt it was that which first ruffled his temper. He liked me no less for my chaffing allusions to his sixpence, and in a desperate effort to get even with me, he looked me up and down, assessing the possible value of my clothes. They were not my best, but probably he did not know that.

"Yer're very 'igh and mighty—aren't yer?" said he. "Sixpence is nuffin to you, is it? Why I could buy you up and not feel the weight of it gone out of me pocket."

"I'm sure you could," I replied. "I don't doubt that for a moment. But you must remember there's a little difference between us. I'm not for sale. You are."

Then, when I asked him if there was another place in the market where I could buy bulbs, he was too red in the face to answer me.

I suppose in a way I got the best of it. I had the last word, which is the victor's perquisite in these matters. But it left a strange feeling of dissatisfaction in my mind. For however much to the point my retort may have been, he knew more about flowers and gardens than I did, and since I have been to Ballysheen I have come to judge of people by their knowledge and love of the treasures that the earth brings forth. For all my smartness, I counted him a cleverer man than myself.

But it was not that only which made me heavy of heart as I walked away to find another seedsman; it was the information I had been given by my friend of the generous purse. I could not grow sweet peas in my window-boxes. For that matter, could I grow anything but a few bulbs, which for one year at least will blossom anywhere, since they feed upon themselves? And I had visions of eschscholtzias, cornflowers, asters, gypsophila—the Lord knows what—

all names that I had heard Cruikshank make such frequent and easy use of—names which Bellwattle loved for ever to be rolling on her tongue. All these, then, I supposed would be denied me.

"Dandy," said I, as we walked down King Street from the Garden, "when God made the world, I don't believe He meant there to be any cities, or why did he begin with a garden? Surely a city, sterile and fruitless like this, can't be an advancement on a garden?"

It occurred to me then that I was taking a very extreme point of view; a point of view without any suggestion of that logic for which I so often pride myself. Of course, there must be cities, just as there must be workshops in a world where work is to be done. But they go home from workshops. Nobody lives in a workshop. Why don't they go home, then, from cities? It is a sort of thing that Bellwattle would say, as when she asked why they could not cover up a field of corn to protect it from the rats. But I know what I mean. When once you have cast your bread upon the waters of a great city you never do go home. The workshop is your fate then as long as you live. Telephones, telegraphs, all throw out their clutching tentacles, dragging you back into the vortex whenever you try to escape. There is no escape. You steal away towards home; but these ghostly arms stretch forth and you are sucked back into the heart of it once more, back to the city where the flowers will not blossom—the city of oblivion.

I wonder how many men start their lives with a vision that one day they will win their garden of remembrance? I wonder how long it takes them before they join in that crowd of men and women whose eyes ache and whose feet are tired as they hasten to forget?

CHAPTER II

It was as I passed out of King Street that I bethought me of my club; of the hall-porter there who bears a reputation for rose-growing. He has a strange natural ugliness of features which has often drawn me to converse with him as I come in or go out of the building. Our discussions are none of them very weighty or worthy of record. I remark upon the weather while I wait for him to get my letters; in return he tells me of his troubles with the new messenger whose medals speak well for the mightiness of his chest but, as the hall-porter assures me, say nothing in recommendation of his intelligence.

How the knowledge of this amiable hobby of rose-growing came to be known of him by the members is more than I can understand. He has never mentioned it to me, and I should have thought that such an observation as "A bad time for the roses" would have been an excellent reply to some of my meteorological remarks.

He has, however, never expressed himself in that way so I took his reputation on trust, walked straight into the club and asked for my letters.

"Nothing this morning, sir," said he. He did not

even look in the little pigeon-hole marked B. This threw me back at once upon my own resources.

"What sort of a spring do you think we're going to have?" I inquired.

He peered out of the tiny window of his hall-porter's house, from which he could just see two square feet of sky.

"It's difficult to say, sir," said he.

It must have been.

"Do you think your roses will do well this year?" I went on.

He took off his glasses and looked at me. All the precise expression of the hall-porter had suddenly slipped from him. I could detect in his eyes a similar look to that which I see always in the eyes of Cruikshank when he is at work in his garden. Can this be the effect of just one word—roses? Will it in one moment convert a man from a machine into a human being with just that light of Nature in his eyes as plucks him there and then from the confusion of the crowd?

"How did you know I went in for roses, sir?" he asked.

I said that I had heard some one of the members mention the fact and it had interested me.

"I suppose you live in the country?" I added.

He shook his head, wiped his glasses—seemingly to no purpose, since he did not put them on again—and pushed aside some things upon his desk that were not the least in the way.

"I used to, sir; last year I did. I'd a little place at

Loughton in Essex, not far from the Forest—Epping. It was quite the country there. I'd a nice bit of garden and a friend of mine living next door had a sort of nursery- . greenhouse and some ground—and he used to give me plants he didn't want. But it was too far away comin' up here in the winter early of a morning. So I got nearer London."

"You didn't give up your garden," I exclaimed, "just because it was a little difficult to get up to Town?"

"Well, it didn't agree with the wife," he admitted. "She felt lonely down there with me up here all day long. Besides, she has a taste for the theatres and seein' the shops, so we moved up to Fulham. It's much handier, but, of course, I haven't got a garden, not to speak of, now."

"How much?"

"About the size of this small hall, sir. But roses won't grow there. I've tried, giving 'em all the manure I could get; but they don't take to Fulham. It's easy enough to get me[illegible]n London, sir; there's plenty of that in the s[illegible]ets. It's the soil that's wanting."

"That's the truest description of a city I ever heard," said I. And then I asked his advice about my window-boxes. He took an immense interest in them; even brought out a seedsman's catalogue from his desk and went so thoroughly into the subject as made me in time imagine that we were dealing with acres instead of inches.

So now I have bought all my bulbs. It was a great

day when they were planted. With a table fork which Moxon obtained from the housekeeper's kitchen we prepared our beds, and all the while stood Dandy with his fore-paws on the window-sill watching the operation with breathless interest.

As I put them in, covering the mould over their little brown bodies, I looked up occasionally at Moxon, who stood by with his mouth wide open.

"Marvellous thing, isn't it, Moxon?" said I, "to think that these little bulbs are going to bring up yellows and blues and pinks, all the colours of the rainbow, just out of themselves?"

"I was thinking that, sir," said he, "though I don't know as it's any more wonderful than a woman having babies."

That remark is characteristic of Moxon, who has sentiment to his finger-tips and imagines that he never shows a sign of it.

"My God!" said I. "You don't mean to compare the two! One's a catastrophe—it'll be a very different matter when these crocuses and tulips are delivered of their flowers."

I saw the look in his face then as when a man is on the verge of being traitor to himself. I had only to press the matter a little further and he would be abusing the wonderful functions of maternity in order to maintain his own pathetic sense of dignity. I pressed it further without any delay.

"You don't mean to say you'd like your wife to have babies?" I said, as I laid one of the little brown snow-

drop bulbs under the mould and, after the manner of Cruikshank, tucked the clothes well over its head. "You wouldn't talk of it as a splendid event for her, would you?"

I could see him thinking how wonderful it would be if he had a wife; how still more wonderful it would be if she gave him a baby of his very own.

"I thought you knew I was not married, sir," he said, presently.

"I was speaking hypothetically," said I.

"Indeed, sir, I was not aware of that."

Hypothetically was undoubtedly beyond him. Therefore, "I was supposing that you were," I added for his benefit. "And if you were, you wouldn't care to have to wheel a baby out in a pram, would you?"

"God forbid," said he, most fervently.

I turned my face from him as I planted another bulb. It would not have done at all if he had seen my smile.

"Now you see," said I, "how odious your comparison was. You wouldn't be ashamed to be seen out with one of these snowdrops in your button-hole?"

"Oh, no, sir."

"But you exclaim 'God forbid' when I suggest that you might have to wheel your baby out in a perambulator."

This treachery to himself was more than Moxon could bear. He laid down the bag of snowdrop bulbs, leaving Dandy and me to finish the business by ourselves.

It is more than a week now since they were planted,

and almost every day I see a fresh little green nose thrusting its way out of the mould. At first the joy of these discoveries was spoilt in a great measure by Moxon, who, when he came up with my tea in the morning, would announce the arrival of another crocus or another snowdrop with that same suppressed excitement as if he were telling me of an addition to the household.

"All right—all right, Moxon," I said testily, one morning. "I only want you to valet me, you needn't look after my garden."

That must have been a very early morning temper, or I should have laughed at the ridiculousness of calling a few window-boxes a garden. The fact of the matter is, I was jealous and, as I lay drinking my tea, I came to the conclusion that I was behaving like a dog in my own manger. The next morning, therefore, when Moxon came in with the tray, I asked him whether there had been a frost.

"Just slightly, sir," said he.

"Have they suffered at all?" I asked quickly.

"Have what suffered, sir?"

"The crocuses."

"Not that I know of, sir. I didn't look."

Of course I deserved it; but it is the things which one deserves that are so annoying. I determined not to be done, so the next morning before Moxon's arrival, I slipped on a dressing-gown and hurried softly downstairs. It was just as I expected. There was Moxon, bending over one of the window-boxes and, with a

gentle finger, raking away the mould in places to see if he could find any more crocuses shooting up their tender green.

"Put that mould back, Moxon," I said severely. At the unexpected sound of my voice, I thought the poor man would have fallen out of the window into the area below. "What are you doing?" I added.

"Just making it a little tidy, sir. That was all."

I let it go at that. I knew he would never transgress in such fashion again. I believe, moreover, that it is always best to leave a shred of dignity with those whom you would admonish. It is by that single shred they still cling to you. Deprive them of it and the only dignity left them is to go out of your sight altogether.

Thus it was, with my snowdrops, my crocuses and my hyacinths that I fought my battle with depression through those last months of winter, till I should see the first hopeful light of spring. Twice every week also, I rose betimes in the morning and with Dandy was out to Covent Garden before the market closed at nine. It was Moxon who first informed me that I could get flowers cheaper that way. Accordingly when I had proved the truth of it, I filled my rooms with them.

"How did you happen to know about this?" I asked him when one fine morning I had returned with an armful of daffodils.

"I go there sometimes myself, sir," he replied; "my mother's a fancy for those sort of things, and though I don't 'old with petting women up with flowers, I send them to her occasionally because she's an invalid."

"It's bound to spoil a woman if you send her flowers?" I said solemnly.

"Bound to," he agreed.

I handed him a bunch of daffodils.

"Smell those," said I.

He buried his face in them and breathed as though he were drawing into his lungs the very first breath of spring.

"Send a bunch of them to your sister," I added casually; "it'll cheer her up if she's still taking to religion."

His face lit up with a wonderful smile of gratitude.

"It's very good of you, sir,—I can't afford daffodils yet—not till they're a bit cheaper. Amy will be pleased."

How easy it is to spoil women, thought I.

Oh—but that morning when they brought the first daffodils into market. You knew then you had been waiting for them so long, as on some dreary, lonely road you stand, long waiting for the mistress of your heart. The moments pass by and still she does not come. But you know in your spirit that she cannot fail. When last you met, she gave her promise and, sooner would you believe the heavens might fall, than that her promise should be broken. But suddenly you hear her. The faint distant sound of her little feet comes tapping softly along the road into your ears. For that first instant your heart stops its beating that you may hear aright. Then nearer she comes and nearer . . . Another moment and you can dimly discern

her figure against a darkening belt of trees. The footsteps quicken, for by this time she has seen you too. At last she is close within your arms, and her cheek, so cool and damp with the dew that it has gathered, is laid against your cheek.

It is somehow like this that the daffodils are brought one frosty morning to those who wait for them in Covent Garden.

So you come of a sudden into a golden glory. A man holds out a bunch before you and says:

"Nice and fresh, sir; only picked a few hours ago."

Only picked a few hours ago! You plunge your face in them as into cold water, and they too are cool and damp like the cheeks of your little mistress. Like her they have come at last to your long and patient waiting.

CHAPTER III

I CAN bear no longer these futile speculations of my mind. For months past I have tried to keep them under subjection, but it is impossible to do so any more. I must have word of Clarissa. Is she happy? Have I misjudged that young man? Perhaps that evening when I saw him in the restaurant was only a momentary lapse of conduct. Maybe I have done him an injury and she is happy after all.

But no matter how often I put these questions to myself, they return again unanswered. I have an obstinate belief that she could not be happy with him. Sometimes I think it is this uncertainty about Clarissa which is inducing in me a mood, a conviction—the conviction that I have about run the length of my tether and there is but little left for me but to snap it and have done with the business altogether.

I may be wrong, but it seems to me that a man should earn his meal before he eats it, deserve his sleep before he takes it and, above all, justify his existence that he may live. Now I find myself putting the question to my mind twenty times a day—how in the name of Heaven do I justify mine? It is unanswerable, or, rather, I can answer it too well. I do not justify it

at all. Had I been of any service to Clarissa, it might have seemed different. But through my interference, I was only the means of spurring her destiny to its end. Certainly Bellwattle intervened, but that was all on my account. Had I not gone to Ballysheen, she would never have persuaded that poor child to rush so recklessly to meet her fate.

Once or twice I have written to Bellwattle, making inquiries. But I hear nothing that can be of much account. She tells me in letters wonderfully misspelt, but in words that are indeed graphic to me, how the roses are doing, of the baskets full of sweet peas that she picked every morning all through the summer. Yet of Clarissa, she gives me no report, except that the Miss Fennells say how they receive letters from her, telling them of her excitements in London and how happy she is in her new life.

I misdoubt these letters in the bottom of my heart. They do not ring true. So at last I have made up my mind to take a definite course of action. I am going to th[illegible]se in Chelsea, the address of which was given me by Miss Teresa that Sunday afternoon before I left Ballysheen. If by this step I gain no definite news of her, then I shall hazard one final chance. I shall go and call upon Mrs. Farringdon, that married sister of the Miss Fennells whose address Bellwattle has discovered for me. If from her I can elicit nothing, then—it will be, as Peter Pan so wisely says, "a great adventure."

Having thought all this out, quite calmly and collectedly, I called Dandy.

"What'll be done with you, old man?" I asked.

He wagged his tail, but when he found that that was not the right answer he frowned.

"I think I know what we shall have to do with you," I continued. "There's a lady in Ireland who'd give her eyes to get you. That's where you'll go. You always were a success with ladies, weren't you?"

I thought he would have wagged his tail at that, but he still frowned as though he caught the note beneath my voice, that note, I suppose, of final despair, when a man knows that it is all but up with him. For so it had happened to me, as I had warned that little child it would happen to her. The spirit in me was broken. I felt the suspicion in every thought that I was done for.

It is when one comes to a conclusion as definite as this that one can throw into the voice a spurious tone of cheerfulness, which is the final admission of defeat.

I rose then from my chair with a laugh and called out to Dandy that we were setting off for Chelsea. But instead of leaping about me in his dancing way, as he does whenever he hears we are going out for a walk, he crept after me, close at my heels, and all the gaiety was gone out of him. I determined then that if the worst should happen, if I could get no news of Clarissa, I would send him over to Bellwattle. She would take care of him for his own sake—perhaps for his master's, too.

It was a shabby little street in Chelsea—two rows of houses on either side, with only the number on

the lintels to differentiate between them. A strange mixture of apprehension and excitement possessed me as I approached the door. What if I should find her there? What could I say if I did? What does a man say after an absence of some months to the woman who has prayed God that she will never see him again? I expect he leaves the matter as much to chance as I did.

After a moment's hesitation while these thoughts were passing through my mind, I rang the bell and waited, my heart hammering wildly in all my pulses, till I heard the sound of footsteps on the other side of the door. Directly it reached me I felt quiet and ready for whatever should come to pass.

When the door was opened, there confronted me an elderly woman. She was stout, wearing a close-fitting blouse of some black material closely covered with white spots which long had lost their whiteness. There was the unmistakable lodging-house look about her which is quite different in London to any other place in England. In a moment she had taken me in. Quite wrongly, perhaps, but to her own satisfaction. My coat and hat she had priced before I had had time to open my mouth. They were priced by her standard, which I have no doubt was the pawnshop, and probably from that point she was right to within a penny. There was that look in her, too, of suspicion. I felt it in the very way she opened the door. There had been the sense of expectation without greeting, and for one instant that expression of doubt as if she were not quite sure

whether I were the person she expected to see. Directly I saw her, I knew my search there was hopeless.

"Does Mrs. Fennell live here?" I inquired.

She shook her head, still appraising me with her eyes.

"How long is it since she left?"

"She never lived here."

There seemed to be a certain cautiousness in this, so I persisted with my questions.

"But Mr. Fennell lived here?" said I.

"Yes—he did."

"How long is it since he left?"

"May I arsk why yer want ter know?" she inquired.

"I have private reasons," I replied.

Her eyes took a sudden smallness into them. I can explain the expression in no other way.

"Does he owe *you* money?" she asked.

"No."

"He does me."

"I'm sorry to hear it," said I.

"'Cos you think I won't get it—eh?"

"I don't know anything about that."

"Well—I don't think I will. I've got a boy of mine what's in a solicitor's office to write him a letter, but he don't take no notice of it."

"Where did you send it to?" I asked, without any of the eagerness that I felt so strongly in me.

"To a club where he stays sometimes."

"What's the name of it?"

"The Lyric. Who told you he was married?"

I replied that I had heard so.

"God help the girl," she muttered; whereupon apologising for the trouble I had given her I walked away. The name of God in her throat, and applied in such a case, sickened me. Directly I saw a taxi I hailed it. Dandy and I jumped in.

"The Lyric Club," said I.

It was just the club to which I should have expected him to belong. I had often heard of its members and their habits. They were a dissolute lot, composed of those impecunious young men who manage to subsist in some marvellous way upon their debts, maintaining an appearance of affluence by superficiality of manner and a certain smart way of dressing themselves, which will continue to deceive tradesmen as long as the world goes round. Their main object in life is to obtain money, and that without working for it. Wherefore they have a thousand little irons in the fire. Here they know some young man who has written a play; there they know some young man with money who is fool enough to put it on, and between the two they manage to derive some pecuniary benefit out of other people's brains which enables them to make their way, backing horses and playing cards for the next month or so.

Young Fennell must have been clearly eligible for such membership. I could have conceived no more fitting reputation for him than to say that he belonged to the Lyric Club.

The hall-porter was almost asleep when I entered. To my inquiries as to whether Mr. Fennell were in

the club, he slowly opened his eyes and beckoned to a page-boy.

"Is Mr. Fennell in the club?" he asked.

"No, sir."

"Has he been in lately?" I inquired.

The hall-porter shook his head.

"Has he been in lately?" I repeated.

"I said no, didn't I?"

"You wagged your head," said I. "I thought you might be going to sleep again."

"If you had to keep the hours I do, sir——" he began.

I begged his pardon. I imagine it is no easy job to be hall-porter at that club.

"When did he come in last?"

He repeated my question to the page-boy, who informed him that it was about five days before. Then the hall-porter looked at me as though to say, "You heard what he said?"

I had heard and I left the club. There was now left my last hope of finding her. With a bitter feeling of despair weighing heavily on me I got back into the taxi, giving the address in Phillimore Gardens, where Mrs. Farringdon lived.

It was no time in the morning, I know, to be paying calls. But what man in such a case considers that? The fever of pursuing my mission to its ultimate end was a furnace burning in me. I could no more have waited the few hours that would have given the odour of etiquette to my visit, than I could have flown to

Phillimore Gardens. It had come to be in my mind that I must know then and at once. All contemplation of delay was impossible. As we drove out to Kensington, Dandy jumped upon the seat beside me and, pushing up closely to my side pressed his nose against my arm. His brown eyes as they looked up at me were full of questions.

"What are we doing this for?" he asked. "Why are we tearing about in motors? Is anything the matter?"

"We're trying to find somebody," said I. "Somebody who—oh—what's it matter."

"But why do we want to find her so much," he insisted, "if it doesn't matter?"

At that, suddenly, I realised something. I became aware of the fact that the questions I found in Dandy's eyes were only an expression of the thoughts harbouring in my own mind. It was not he who asked them; it was I who asked myself. In that curly black head of his were probably no other ideas than memories of battles long past, of moments of the chase when he was bounding over the heather on those cliffs in Ireland. Or maybe it was only the affection of a dog for the man who treats him well. But all that searching interrogation was nothing more nor less than what I wanted to know myself.

It was I who asked myself why we should need so much to find her. Therefore, when I came upon this startling discovery, it brought me to the understanding of what I had not dared permit myself to realise

before. I needed so much to find her because I needed her so much myself. I, who had talked so easily about the folly of plunging myself in love, was by now bitterly its slave. And so, as I came to review the events of the past months, I was made conscious that Bellwattle had spoken the truth from the very first. Indeed, I had known nothing of it till now. For when you begin by falling in love with a gown of canary-coloured satin, it takes you some time before you come to be aware of it. And nothing less than this was what happened to me. The loneliness of that child in Ireland had drawn me to her. And now that I had seen her, even only those two times, I felt in the deepest heart of me that I was the man to make her happy.

This is the true conceit of love I suppose, that I who am so disfigured should for one moment imagine such a thing. As I looked at myself in the mirror which the taxi provided, I, too, was amazed that such a thought could enter my head. But it was the truth. There was no getting away from it, and as such it must be suffered with what courage I could muster to bear it.

If only I could find her and hear from her own lips that she was happy, I knew that I should be content. Married or unmarried, surely it made but little difference to me. She had prayed God she would never see me again. If once I might hear from her that she had found her place again in the sun, then, as far as I was concerned, her prayer should be answered, I would never see her again.

By this time we had reached the number in Phillimore Gardens. The taxi pulled up when, telling Dandy to stay there quietly till I returned, I hurried up the steps and rang the bell.

"Is Mrs. Farringdon in?" I inquired of the maid.

She said she was, whereupon, having taken my card, I was shown into just such a drawing-room as I should have imagined the Miss Fennells furnishing, with taste acquired by a visit to London. I had begun counting the cushions and photographs when the good lady came in. She is Miss Teresa over again, with just that difference of expression which marriage makes to the confidence in a woman's eyes. For if you are a woman, I believe, and reach the age which poor Miss Teresa has attained, there comes into your eyes, whether you will it or not, the look of watching for some phantom thing which never rides the seas upon your actual horizon. You know it is there, because you hope it is there. Maybe it is the disappointed spirit of maternity which has waited so long upon the road that its eyes are tired of watching.

With just the look of confidence in place of this Mrs. Farringdon was a repetition of Miss Teresa. She bowed to me stiffly as she came into the room, half closing the door with that unconscious sense of self-protection which is natural to the less prepossessing of her sex.

"Mr. Bellairs?" said she, and she referred in the

proper way to my card, which she held scrupulously in her fingers.

"I met your sisters in Ireland," said I, without delay. "I was staying with Mr. and Mrs. Townshend at Ballysheen. I met there also a Miss Fawdry, who was living with your sisters. I must apologise for calling on you at this time in the morning; but I want to know where she is to be found. She was married from your house, I believe."

For a moment she stood there shaking her head backwards and forwards, as though I had come to the wrong house altogether; as though she was not Mrs. Farringdon, and had never heard of Miss Fawdry in her life before.

"Miss Fawdry has gone back to the West Indies," said she.

"Gone back!" I exclaimed. And at that moment I could not know whether I was glad or sorry. "Gone back," I repeated. "When? Why? Wasn't she married here from your house?"

"Oh, dear me, no."

"But your nephew left Ballysheen with her to marry her here in London."

"My nephew does many peculiar things," she replied, tartly, "that do not come to my hearing. Indeed, I did hear about this. My sisters told me that he was bringing her over. But when he came to see me, he told me that they had decided not to be married, and that Miss Fawdry had gone back to—Dominica, I think it was."

"Your nephew's a—rascal," I exclaimed. "Where does he live? I'll horsewhip him within an inch of his life."

She became so nervous then at my sudden burst of anger that she retired quickly to the door and called for Fred.

"I beg your pardon," said I. "I have no right, I know, to come as a stranger to your house and tell you what perhaps you already know about your nephew. I'm sorry."

But she took no notice. She stood there at the door, waiting for the arrival of Fred, who was no other than Mr. Farringdon himself. To him she hurriedly explained everything. He was a meek little man, and he listened to it all with a wary eye upon me.

"What's this mean, sir," said he, and his voice was brave and his attitude was great.

"I have already explained," said I. "Moreover I have apologised, too. I understand that your nephew has not married Miss Fawdry."

"Yes—yes—that is so," he replied.

"Now can you tell me where he lives?"

"I'm sorry, but I'm afraid I can't. He lets me know nothing about his movements except when he is in need of money. As that apparently has not been the case for some time, we have not heard of him for the past six months. I'm sorry I can't tell you where he lives."

"But, my dear, he says he'd horsewhip him if he knew," said Mrs. Farringdon, in consternation.

"That's why I'm sorry," said the little man.

With a sudden instinct I held out my hand. He shook it warmly, and there I left him to such mercy as his wife should feel inclined to offer him. From the glance in her eyes I doubt if there were a great deal of it.

Dandy's face was peering round the corner of the taxi door as I came out. I told the man to drive home. Then I got inside, closed the door and sat down beside him.

"Well?" he asked. "Well—did you find her?"

I shook my head at him.

"She's gone," said I. "We shall never see her again. They've answered that prayer of hers. She said she'd ask God."

"Well?" said Dandy.

"That's all," said I.

CHAPTER IV

THE first snowdrop blossomed in my window-boxes this morning. Its small, white face looked so timid as it stared at me out of the fog. I felt almost sorry for its loneliness, only that I admired it so much for its bravery. It must need some courage to be the first flower of the year—a pioneer into unknown kingdoms. I know so many people who would sooner lie abed than be the first to get up on such a morning as this.

I found it for myself, but knew well I was not the first to discover it. Moxon was waiting about in the room when I came down to breakfast, doing nothing in that feverishly-occupied way which betokens subterfuge of some kind or another. I could see quite plainly what he was up to and, in such cases as these, I hate to disappoint people. He wanted me to draw his attention to the snowdrop, since, for his dignity's sake, he could not be supposed to have seen it himself. Now, to have taken no notice of it would have been cruel, yet I was sorely tempted to it. I wanted to observe to what straits of ingenuity he would be put before dire necessity compelled him to leave the room.

In such a pass as this I meet the devil of temptation half way. I succumb to him so far as to see the little

play performed almost to the fall of the curtain then, in the nick of time, I surrender my advantage to spite the devil and please myself.

Moxon had placed a vase of daffodils in five different positions about the room and, compelled at last to be satisfied with them, he was about to leave me to myself. At that moment I strolled casually to the window and, at the very door, he paused.

"Oh, here's our first snowdrop in blossom," said I.

I think he liked my calling it "ours." A big smile spread across his face, and he came over to my side with such speed as he might, consistent with a proper respect for my confidence.

"Wonderful where they get the white from out of that dirty mould," said he. From the ready way he announced it, I felt sure that he had had that sentence in his mind all the time, that he had thought it would please me to know he did think of such things. He had probably been harbouring it in his head since seven o'clock in the morning. Whether that is so or not, it did please me. It is just the thing I always marvel at myself.

"But don't call it dirty mould," said I. "There's hardly a thing I know so clean as a ploughed field in spring, when the earth has just been turned after a long winter."

No doubt it was I who was considering my dignity now. No matter how right a schoolboy may be in his answer, the master always corrects him, sets him right in a phrase or some insignificant fact. I was doing

much the same with Moxon. All these little tricks are the efforts of the superior human being for the maintenance of dignity. I know a man who every evening of his life partakes of a glass of milk for his health's sake. One night his dog fell foul of it and consumed it all. But it was not for punishment alone that he stole two of the dog's biscuits in return. What can be more undignified than having your evening's milk stolen by your dog! What, then, can more perfectly regain your dignity than stealing two of his biscuits and calling it the adjustment of punishment to the crime? If Moxon could not openly admit that he had seen the snowdrop before, I could not entirely agree with him. It cut both ways.

"Of course, I didn't mean dirty in that sense, sir," he replied. "Only that it makes my hands what I should call not quite clean."

"When you tidy up, you mean?" said I.

"Well"—I had caught him in that trap—"yes, sir—when I—tidy up."

This all sounds very ridiculous, I admit. Two men wrangling about the bloom of a snowdrop do not present an object for much respect! But when you come to think of it, it is just of such incidents as these that life is composed, with here and there some real event falling heavily into the peaceful rippling of the stream. It may fall upon a gravel bottom, when the broken water catches in a thousand points of light the glorious reflection of the sun. It may fall where there is sleeping mud which, disturbed, sullies all the clearness of the

stream. Then only Time who, not alone heals but cleanses, shall sweep the ugliness of it away.

Men and women are just as human whether it be over a field of snowdrops or a field of turnips. I would sooner it were snowdrops myself. For this is life as it seems to me—a crowd of undignified little creatures, pathetically, humorously, in all loveableness, trying to assume a dignity which they do not possess; only in great moments proving the nobility of their creation, when, by the sudden force of circumstance, they are, willy-nilly, driven to be themselves.

I little imagined as I amused myself by these thoughts with Moxon standing by, staring down with me at the timid blossom of that little snowdrop, that I for one was upon the eve of such an event as would force me by its circumstance to some definite course of action. Yet that very night I came to know of Clarissa—know of her in such a way as I had rather hear of any misfortune beside.

Ever since that day when I had heard from Mrs. Farringdon that she had returned unmarried to Dominica, I had striven with my conscience to know whether I were glad or not.

"I shall never see her again," said I.

"She's found the happiness you urged her to," replied my conscience.

"Did I really urge her to that?" I asked.

So much of a head as my conscience possesses, it nodded, and nodded vigorously.

"But did I mean it?" said I.

This is the only way with one's conscience, to silence it. Drive it into a corner of perplexity, when even truthfulness can be of no avail.

"Did I mean it?" I repeated, and my conscience could say nothing. "In the back of my mind," I continued, pressing my advantage to its uttermost, "was there not some hope that I might win her for myself? Why should I be glad then that she had gone?"

And the upshot of it all was that I neither knew whether I was glad or sorry. For this is the selfishness of that great unselfishness of love, that we will give the whole world, our life if necessary, to the woman whom we worship, but the giving must be ours.

Yet that night I knew well enough whether I were glad or not, for that night, trying in vain to find the waters of forgetfulness in the finger-bowls on my supper-room table, I saw Clarissa herself.

It was all a lie! She had never returned to Dominica; and as I pieced together the story from what I had been told, from what I saw before me then, I grew sick at heart with a nameless apprehension.

Young Fennell was with her; there was also another man—a member no doubt of the Lyric Club—and the same woman to whom the story of Clarissa had been told that night almost a year before, when first there had been sown in my mind the seed of my adventure.

For some long minutes I was too amazed to do anything but watch them unperceived. Two bottles of champagne stood on the table, and one by one the five

courses of the supper were placed before them. They all ate and drank as though it were the one essential meal of their day—all of them except Clarissa, who nibbled at her bread like a little mouse, only sipping from her glass lest they should fill it up again too soon. But in the laughing and the talking she was no exception to the rest. To all the popular tunes of the day they rapped with their forks in applause upon the table. It was just that type of *partie carrée* I had seen so often in those rooms; so often wondered at for the hollowness of the enjoyment it suggested. They would—had I not known them—have been just such a company of players as I am accustomed to watch in this one particular theatre of mine. But, being Clarissa, it was no play to me then. Every time she laughed, I felt it buffet in my face. Every time when with the others she tapped her fork upon the table, she might have been driving the prongs of it into my flesh. That she could find laughter with such men and women! That she could applaud that loathsome music, which only sensualises the minds of those that hear it! All these thoughts burnt hot inside me, and yet I could do no more than stay and watch it to the end.

There was, moreover, in my mind the determination that I still had some questions to ask that young man before I let him out of my sight again. With that intention, therefore, I sat quietly in my seat. I had settled with myself that I would speak to him when they were all going out—contrive that he should remain behind, since, if there should be words between us, as

was most likely, it should not in any way disgrace Clarissa.

In the first few moments I had thought it strange for it to be here that I should meet Clarissa again. But there was not so much strangeness in it after all. A man always returns to his old haunts. It is the instinct of the animal for its lair, the salmon for its pool. But though he had seen me there before, he little expected to see me there again.

It was with no little satisfaction that I noted his first glance of recognition and the look of consternation that followed it. He waited just a moment, thinking, doubtless, to hide from me the fact that he had seen me; then, leaning across the table, he whispered something into Clarissa's ear. With that same startled expression of the frightened bird, she looked across the room and her eyes met mine.

In that one sudden moment, I felt she was recalling every word I had said to her that morning on the cliffs at Ballysheen. For her eyes had no hatred in them now; only fear, the fear as when one is discovered and is ashamed. She tried to meet my look, and though in my eyes I felt there was showing all the affection I had so lately come to realise, yet still she failed. In a moment she was looking away again, forcing herself to talk to the man beside her as if t' incident had passed completely from her mind.

Presently young Fennell leaned across the table and spoke to her once more, then rose and came down the room.

"Shall I speak to him now?" I thought. Later I wished to God I had, for he passed out of the room and, as the time went by, I realised that he was not coming back again. To make sure I went to the cloak-room in the vestibule. They told me he had gone.

"Damnation!" I exclaimed. The liveried attendants stood there with meaningless faces, powerless to help me. I was powerless to help myself.

For a while I remained there undecided, staring at the door through which he must have passed. He had escaped me. It roused a thousand suspicions in my mind. He feared our meeting. But why? What had happened? I felt sick with the multitude of suggestions that came pouring into my brain. There was only one thing to be done—to speak with Clarissa. Once having brought my determination to that, I went back to my table and called a waiter.

"Give me," said I, "a piece of paper and a pencil."

He brought them to me, standing by me at my direction while I wrote. "*Dear Mrs. Fennell*," I scribbled—my hands were shaking foolishly—"*may I have five minutes' conversation with you if you can spare them after supper? I shall not offend you again as I did before.*"

"Take this," said I, "to the lady at that table, the lady with the dark hair, and ask for an answer. Say that I do not wish to disturb her while she is with friends."

"I'm sorry, sir," he replied, "but we are not allowed to deliver notes."

"That be damned for a tale!" said I. "What the devil do you mean? Do you want to suggest that I'm trying to force my acquaintance on a lady whom I don't know?"

"I'm sorry, sir—but those are our orders. There's been some unpleasantness on two or three occasions."

I told him to send me the head-waiter. The mâitre d'hôtel came, rubbing his hands. These foreigners with their genial faces and silky ways! I always see such contempt in their cunning little eyes.

"You've seen me here pretty often," I began.

He laved his hands more obsequiously than ever as he bowed assent.

"Well—there's a lady over there at that table. She is a friend of mine. I don't know the people with whom she is supping and, therefore, don't wish to disturb their party. Kindly take this note over to her. If you don't deliver it I shall be compelled to do so myself."

He took the note without a word.

For the first few moments while he was gone, I could not look in that direction. Now I suppose I know the madness which comes to those who love. It is madness. It is nothing less. In that short space I might have been another being, so overwhelming was the rush of emotions that trampled through me. In as many seconds I was prompted to the doing of a hundred different things; yet I sat there quietly, scarcely moving, until I raised my eyes and saw Clarissa with nervous fingers opening my note. The

other woman was looking round in my direction with curious eyes, in which I could trace that half-puzzled look of recognition. But not once did Clarissa turn her eyes towards me. Even when she had finished reading it, she kept her face averted; then, giving some message to the head-waiter, she turned to the man on her right and began to speak as though it were in some hurried explanation. Again the woman stared at me. The man stared, too. Only Clarissa kept her face away. I saw her little fingers feverishly making countless pellets with her bread.

The next moment the maître d'hôtel was bending down with smooth apologies and speaking in my ear.

"The lady is very sorry, sir—but she is afraid there must be some mistake."

"What do you mean?" I asked quickly; but all the time I kept my eyes upon Clarissa. "What do you mean?" I repeated.

"The lady is very sorry, sir," he said again, "but she's afraid there must be some mistake."

A multitude of things came to my mind to be said, but not one of them passed my lips. With such precision as I thought could scarcely be in my nature, I took my note which he had brought back with him, tearing it slowly and evenly into a hundred little pieces, and laid them in a pile upon my table.

"My bill," said I.

CHAPTER V

A SPARROW came and sat upon one of my window-boxes as I was at breakfast this morning, chirping loudly for some reason or other as though it were summer instead of one of those very early days of spring which seem to have dropped by accident from the lap of a generous Providence.

Possibly it was the bright yellow of the crocuses, now in bloom, which attracted him. A day when his ancestors lived in trees instead of upon sooty house-tops was no doubt dimly stirring in his semi-consciousness. He almost persuaded me that his chirping was a song, so much lusty energy did he throw into it. It was only when I came to listen carefully that I realised there were but two notes to his compass. Truly he made the most of them. Doubtless it was a lesson to me to make the most of such shallow compass as is mine. If it were, I did not learn of it. My mind had been made up for some time now and, as soon as Moxon had cleared away, I sat down at my desk and wrote a letter :

My dear Bellwattle,—I want to make you a fitting present in gratitude for my visit to Ballysheen. Don't

attempt to ask me why I have left it so long as this, contenting myself with the mere letter of thanks such as one writes to any hostess. For you were not any hostess and therefore have every justification for asking why, until now, I have treated you so differently. Believe me, I did not think of you when I wrote as of any guest to any hostess, nor of Cruikshank as to any host. I have never forgotten one moment on those cliffs or in that garden, for it seems to me, as I look back upon it, that in those few short weeks, you made me familiar with a wonderful attitude towards life which I would give a great deal to be able to adopt myself. However, that, as you know, is impossible, needing as it does such addition to the personal equation as can never enter into the sum of my experience.

What attitude is available to me under the circumstances, I confess myself absolutely unable to determine. I am one of those unfortunate individuals who, even in the midst of such lively surroundings as these, are of a solitary nature, yet loathe nothing so much as their own company. The little bones which I have had to pick with Providence are so dry by this —you do not know it, but I am forty-four—that to sit alone and worry at them now would be beyond human endurance. Occasionally in bed in the early morning or at night when I am left alone and my man Moxon has retired, I find myself speculating upon what niche in God's gallery of human beings I have been meant to fill. So far as I can see there is not one.

And then, in accordance with all human nature, I try to shift the blame upon some shoulders other than my own. Circumstance, that my mother should have died when she did—my father, that he has never brought me up to any profession—then last of all, inevitably myself, that I have taken advantage of the allowance he is making me, spending my money upon easy travelling all over the world which is an education in its way, but fits no man for the real exigencies of life. He could learn more in a cobbler's shop in the Mile End Road. There is as much wisdom as cure in the washing in Jordan. The thing to one's hand is no doubt the thing for one's grasp.

This is mere preliminary, just to show you that I shall never come into occupation of Cruikshank's little cottage in the hollow. Imagine Providence and myself sitting there alone of the long winter nights with a few dry bones upon the table between us! I could not bear such company as that. No—if I am to cut a niche for myself anywhere, it must be in that room in God's gallery, where, as I heard a man say the other day, you will find the *hoi polloi*. I will give you the whole of his sentence, for Cruikshank's benefit if not for yours. He was describing the disadvantages of a new club.

"What I'm afraid will happen," he said, "is this. You'll get all the *hoi polloi* there. There'll be nothing *recherché* about it at all. Plebeian—that's what it'll be and, if there's one thing I hate more than another it is that jarring sound of the *vox populi*."

Show this to Cruikshank and he will explain why he is amused. This man had evidently travelled for his education.

I hope this letter is not too egotistical, a hope based doubtless upon the fact that I know it is. And in a sense, I mean it to be. I entertain a foolish desire that you should appreciate my point of view, so that if at any time you might hear news of me of one sort or another you would be able to apply this confession as a key to the understanding of what you had heard.

And now, after all this preamble, I come to the real reason of my letter, the statement with which I began. I want you to accept a gift in token of my gratitude for all your kindness to me in Ballysheen. I want you to take care of Dandy as your own.

Since those few weeks in Ireland, I have fancied that he has missed the country most terribly, the walks upon those glorious cliffs he had with you, the rambles with both of us when the whole breadth of the earth was his, full of romance, full of adventure, full of rabbits—those hundreds of rabbits you saw that morning, when I saw but two. But most of all, I imagine that he misses that playground of his—your garden—for I remember the very first morning before breakfast, after you had taken him out for a walk, he came to me and, in his own manner, told me what he thought of it all. He raced a dozen times round one of your beds at an angle of forty-five. If you don't know what I mean by an angle of forty-five,

ask Cruikshank. He will explain it to you by means of trigonometry which I know will please you.

That, at any rate, was the expression of all he felt about the country on his first morning in Ballysheen. Remember, it was round the beds he raced—not over them. His interest in flowers is too great for him ever to destroy them. I know this by the way he watched me when I planted the snowdrops and crocuses in my window-boxes. I say this to reassure you.

So far as his habits are concerned, I don't think I can tell you anything but what you do not know already. We give him two meals of dog's biscuits every day. He does not like them broken up on a plate, preferring rather to have them thrown to him whole. But Moxon, who I am sending with him for safe conduct, will explain all this.

Write as soon as you can and let me know that he has arrived safely. Tell me, moreover, if you will, that you are not inconvenienced by this unexpected arrival in your family.

God bless you. I add this, not only because I like the phrase, but because I believe in its efficaciousness for those who merit it. Lastly, give my love to Cruikshank and tell him that when he sets to the making of his new garden in the hollow, he must fill it with sweet peas. I wanted to grow them in my window-boxes, but was told it was out of the question.

Goodbye—Yours A. H. Bellairs.

As soon as I had sealed the letter and addressed it, I sent for Moxon.

"I've got a commission and a journey for you, Moxon," said I, when he came in. He bent his head, saying nothing until he had heard what it was.

"I want you to take Dandy," I continued, "and leave him in the care of Mrs. Townshend in Ballysheen. Can you get what few things you'll need ready in time to catch the night train to Fishguard this evening?"

For a while he stood there and looked at me as though I had said not one single word which he was capable of understanding. His jaw did not exactly drop, but there was all that expression about his face as if it might at any moment.

"Don't you follow me?" said I.

"Yes, sir——"

"Well?"

"How long are you going to leave Dandy there, sir?"

"Oh—for good. I am making a present of him to Mrs. Townshend."

The poor man looked bewildered. I could see he had so much to say, yet was endeavouring his utmost to recollect his place lest he should speak all there was in his mind.

"What's troubling you?" I asked.

"I can't quite understand it, sir," he replied, frowning heavily, as he tried to impress it upon his mind. "Dandy—he's such a companion to you, sir—to both of

us, if I may be permitted to say so. He's like a person about the house. The way he runs for his biscuits—the way he sits up for you when you go out to supper. What I mean to say, sir, he's more than a dog if he is less than a 'uman being. Why—I've seen him, sir, of a night before you've come in, go down to the hall at about a quarter-past twelve when I suppose he'd thought it was half-past—I've seen him go down to the hall door and stand there listening to the sound of every footstep as came along the street. To every sound he'd prick up his ears, expecting it was you. Well—you've seen him, sir, when you've come in of an evening. What I mean to say—I don't think you'd——"

I got up quickly from my chair.

"All right, Moxon," said I. "I'm quite aware of all this. Can you be ready to catch the night train to Fishguard?"

He did not answer. He just bent his head and left the room.

Perhaps it was for ten minutes that I leant on the mantelpiece staring down into the fire. At last I stood up. It was no good. My mind was made up. I stamped the letter to Bellwattle and went out to find Dandy.

He was there in the hall, where Moxon gives the illusion of life to his biscuits, and Moxon was bending over him, saying something. I did not hear a word he said, and at my approach, he got up quickly and walked away, but something I saw made me hesitate more than I had hesitated for the past three weeks. There were tears in his eyes.

"Are you going to blame me?" said I to Dandy—then I picked him up in my arms and carried him into my room. There I told him everything. I reminded him of that first morning in Ballysheen, how readily he had gone out with Bellwattle for a walk, never missing me at all. I brought back to his mind those little white jerky behinds of the rabbits which, when they move, so excite all his proclivities for sport.

"You get none of that sort of thing here," said I.

I tried at last to read him a lecture on the psychology of dogs, explaining how a kind master or mistress and all the stretch of an open country will soon ease their minds of all regret.

"And you know how kind Bellwattle is," I added. "You remember how she kissed you when you went away. But I suppose you're accustomed to that sort of thing from ladies. It's the rabbits you're less likely to forget."

"I knew a dog," said he, "who died of loneliness when his master left him."

"Ah—but you won't be lonely," I answered, quickly. "You'll miss me a bit—but you won't be lonely. Why I might call a thousand times when you were after a rabbit and you wouldn't come back."

"Yes—but then I knew you thought I wouldn't catch it."

I think I persuaded him though that my knowledge of a dog's psychology was quite right, and for the rest of that evening we sat together. We had tea together. He likes his weak and out of the slop bowl.

But at last came Moxon to catch his train.

"Is Dandy ready, sir?" he asked.

"Quite," said I. It was a short word.

I fastened the chain on to his collar for the last time and patted his head.

"Good-bye, old man," said I, and then Moxon, who is a man of much sense, took him out of the room as I walked across to my desk and picked up a bill to read.

The moment they were in the hall, I laid the bill back on the desk and listened. The hall door was opened. It was closed. I half walked to the window; then stopped. What was the good?

A moment later I heard a bark in the street. I do not know, but I suppose after all I must be a sentimentalist. It seemed to me to say—"Good-bye."

Anyhow, I knew by that I was alone.

CHAPTER VI

THEY have been gone two days. I could scarcely have believed that forty-eight hours can so comparably measure Eternity. For two days the house in Mount Street—so far, at least, as I am concerned with it—has been empty. Yet I have had plenty to do. There have been numberless letters to write. It has amused me to find how many people the most common necessities of life bring into one's existence. Consider tradesmen alone! It took me one day at least of conscientious hard work to go through and settle up all my accounts. Yesterday I went into the Park in the morning. There may have been signs of buds swelling on my plane tree, but possibly that was my imagination.

In the afternoon I wrote to my father and those few men to whom it seemed I owed a letter. That did not take me long. There were only two. As a matter of fact, I wrote two more but tore them up. Upon re-reading, they gave me the impression that I was taking myself too seriously.

And now this morning, the morning of the third day since Moxon's departure, I am sitting in my room. Everything is complete. I cannot think of one thing

I have left undone. For Moxon himself, I have left a letter. It was the last and perhaps the most difficult I had to write. But there it is, sealed and addressed, lying on the top of the others on my desk.

For a little while I had considered whether I should write anything to Clarissa. I suppose this is the most selfish moment in my life. The slightest contemplation showed me how cruel a thing it would be. The letter is not written. And now there is nothing more to be done. I cannot forbear smiling, just for a moment, at that bright yellow row of crocuses which adorns my window-boxes. They have come up with such success, but have failed so utterly to fulfil the purpose for which they were intended. I wonder if those in Cruikshank's garden are any better than these.

It strikes me with quaint amusement, too, that had I been able to raise sweet peas, I might now be waiting with growing interest to see the first sight of their little heads of green. But sweet peas do not grow in London. I am not surprised. These later days in February can be bitter cold. I find myself compelled for comfort's sake to close the little strip of open window and poke up the fire into a more cheerful blaze.

The sky is all grey outside. A faint rent of blue was visible for one short moment this morning. Just in that single instant it brought me a sudden rush of eagerness, eagerness to see the whole raiment without one seam of clouds, as it was so many days last May in Ballysheen. But the grey soon swept over it. It looks now as though we were not far from rain. Yet,

as the hall-porter at the club remarked, it is difficult to say. There is no broad horizon from which to see the way the weather comes. It is curious that I should wonder about it one way or another. It matters so little. It does not matter at all.

So this is the end of my adventure. I feel that I have taken up my pen to but little purpose. It will not be so when I put it down. In less than half an hour the ink on it will be dry. I can scarcely believe that not a year has passed since that morning when I sat in the Park watching the little nursery-maid with her electrician. It was the same night that I heard the story of Clarissa and her gown of canary-coloured satin. It was the same night I horrified Moxon by introducing that poor creature with her sodden clothes—and now!

But all this delay in a measure is unnerving me. I have nothing more to write, I——

There is something strange in that. I have still more to write. The bell has rung—the electric-bell which rings in Moxon's room. Probably it is a tradesman whose account is settled by cheque, and sealed up in one of those envelopes on my desk. Shall I answer it? It has just rung again. He will ring once more, perhaps, and then go away.

He has rung once more. If I could only see the doorstep from the window! Oh!—but let him ring and go away! Let him go on ringing! He will soon tire of it, and I shall be left in peace.

CHAPTER VII

I HAVE never yet determined to my satisfaction whether Life be merely the spinning of a coin or a great scheme working itself towards completion by a series of steps, undeviating in their perfect arithmetical progression.

I know it matters little, one way or the other. The thought only recurred to my mind by reason of the fact that had that bell been rung only four times, I should not have answered it. But it was rung five, whereupon it came to me in speculation that no tradesman would have such patience as that and, rising from my chair, I went into the hall. When I opened the door, there stood Clarissa.

I suppose it was amazement that deprived me of speech. For a moment I could but stand and gaze at her. There was not merely the astonishment in my mind at finding that it was she; there was bewilderment also at the change which had taken place in her. She looked ill. But it was not only that; she looked somehow in need of food. There was that nameless suggestion in her appearance as when a woman has ceased to care for her looks. It was apparent notwithstanding that her clothes were well made and costly.

I knew that something had happened, but what with the amazement of seeing her there and the bewilderment at finding her as she was, between the two I was at a loss for words. It must have been half a minute that I stood waiting in silence, still holding to the handle of the door.

"What's the matter?" I asked at last.

"I want to see you," said she.

I held the door wide open for her to pass through, and as I realised from what her coming had saved me, all my body fell to shaking as though a fit of ague were upon me. I felt like one who, calm though he may have been when danger threatened, is made suddenly aware of it when it has passed.

"Go into my sitting-room," said I, and a moment later, when I had pulled myself together, I followed her.

She was sitting timidly on the edge of a chair near the fire and her whole attitude was a mute apology for her presence in my room. All through her body, I knew she was shivering. There was no outward sign of it, but by the way she held to the arm of the chair, by the very posture she had adopted, it was plainly to be seen that all her nerves were trembling with vibration after a great strain. I closed the door.

"I don't know what you think of me for coming here after that letter I returned—after——"

She began that way; then almost all sound went out of her voice. I saw her lips move, but could hear no more than a pathetic murmuring of words.

"I can't quite make it out," I admitted quickly, "but does that matter? You needn't think about the letter—that was a month ago. You've come to tell me what's happened since. What has happened?"

I drew up my chair to the fire. "It will give her the impression," I said to myself, "that we have talked like this a hundred times before." Of course, it may not have done so at all. I only know that women are susceptible to such little matters as these. Doubtless they make life easier. I am certain that the absence of them makes it more difficult. Yet in this instance it seemed not to help Clarissa at all. She just looked up at me with her big eyes, which I shall ever remember best of all when they were full of anger, but still she could not answer. It seemed as though the weight of all she had to tell was too heavily laid upon her for speech. But knowing nothing, how could I help her? And so we might have continued had I not thought suddenly of that look of hunger which I imagined I had seen in her face when I first opened the door.

"Wait a minute," said I, and I spoke easily, quickly, as though I would interrupt her, "let's have tea first. Wouldn't you like some tea?"

The very sound of it brought a different look into her eyes. I swear to Heaven, I believed then I could have made her happy. It is knowing these little things about women that count so much, and a long day is full of them. I do not know how I have learnt them. It is not from experience. But it would seem that I have grown up with the knowledge that to anticipate her

needs is a finer jewel to a woman than any diamond set in platinum. The fact that she would choose the diamond is no proof that she must like it best.

Directly I saw that expression in Clarissa's face I rose and rang the bell for my housekeeper who, in Moxon's absence, was looking after me.

"Now what shall we have to eat?" said I. "What you like—hot buttered toast, muffins, tea-cakes, scones?"

It pleases them also to know that there is a lot to choose from. They love being unable to make up their minds amidst a galaxy of riches. They like you to select for them, just so that they may realise how your selection has eliminated the very thing they did not want.

We went through it all—every stage. She left it to me to choose.

"Tea-cake," said I, because I knew that we should have to send out to buy them, and I wanted to buy something for her. I have said it before; I envy the men who buy things for women. She looked doubtful.

"Scones," I suggested. We should have had to send out for scones, too. But she chose hot buttered toast. That is just the way these things go. When Mrs. Bullwell answered the bell, I told her to bring the whole business as quick as she could.

"What made you think of tea?" asked Clarissa.

"It's the time," said I, "nearly five."

"I'm glad you did think of it."

"Why?"

"I'm hungry."

"Yes—I knew you were," I said quickly. "I saw it in your face. You haven't had any lunch."

"I haven't had anything to-day."

"Good Lord! Why not?"

She looked at me nervously, as though I ought to know all about it; as if I were asking these questions solely in order to put her to the pain of telling me.

"Do you mean to say," I repeated, "that you haven't had one morsel of food to-day?"

When she shook her head two or three times, I went straight to the door and called for Mrs. Bullwell.

"What's it to be?" I asked. "Don't say a chop because it's the first thing that comes into your head. Will you have some eggs or——?"

"A chop," said she.

I persuaded Mrs. Bullwell to promise it in ten minutes.

"And open a bottle of that claret," said I, as she departed. "We sha'n't want any tea now. Well—I'll have some, but you can get it afterwards."

Then I closed the door and came back to Clarissa.

"What does all this mean?" said I. I know I tried to speak as a father speaks to his child. I tried to forget how I cared for her. It is not to the man who is hopelessly wasting his heart on her that a woman gives her confidence. "Something has happened to you," I added. "What is it?"

She pulled off her gloves. She pulled them off in that nervous way by which you knew that she was quite unconscious of her action. Then her lip quivered. I

felt the struggle in her heart to keep back the tears. In a vain way I strove with her, too. For what should I have done had she wept then? In all conscience it had been difficult enough on the cliffs at Ballysheen; but now, when I knew how much she was to me, when I saw quite clearly from what her coming had saved me, tears in her eyes then would have been my certain undoing. For undoubtedly it was Clarissa who had saved me. But for her, I should by this time have been set forth upon my great adventure. It was so utterly impossible now. Some woman at last had come to me in trouble. Some woman! It was the very woman in all the world whose trouble I would most easily have borne.

When I saw the tightness set firm upon her lips once more, for there was well a moment while she struggled with its quivering, then I leant forward. I knew I must drag the story from her; so I felt my way with guessing, half knowing what had happened, leaving her, in little broken syllables, to tell me all the rest.

"Come," said I, gently, "you must tell me. Has he been cruel to you?"

She bent her head in silence.

"But how? How cruel? In what way? Where is he now?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know? When did you see him last?"

"Three weeks ago."

"Where?"

"Where he lived."

"Three weeks ago? Has he gone away?"

"I can't tell you. I've been back to the flat once or twice, but he won't see me."

"*You've* been back? Then he's there? Where have you been living, then?"

"I had a little room in Notting Hill. It's because I've got no money to pay for my lodging——"

Her lip began its quivering once more.

"That you came to me? Because you've got no money? Where is all your money?"

"It's spent. He says there is no more."

I could sit still no longer. It was only possible to hear her story as I walked up and down the room.

"But why did he send you away?" I continued. "You're his wife. He must keep you; he must support you; a thousand times more now that he has spent every farthing that you have. He must go and work his fingers to the bone. He must slave like a dog now—give his whole life up to the reparation of the loss he's brought you. You've every cause to insist upon it. You *must* insist upon it. It's your right—your common right. Good Lord, you're his wife!"

She looked very straightly in my face. Her own was pale as though all anger in it had burnt to whitened ashes. The deep hollows of her eyes were filled with ominous shadows. At that gaze of hers, I thought: "Supposing she might die." I cannot tell why it came into my mind, for how could I have known? A month ago I had seen her well—in a forced gaiety of spirits. How could I have dreamed she was so near the very

climax of her suffering? So I let the thought pass on and felt it shudder through me. I misread that steady gazing of her eyes. I never guessed that she was asking of me more understanding than a man can give. How should I have understood? And yet a woman would have known. Long before this a woman would have taken the knowledge that was being withheld from her. But in my blind innocence I struggled on, dragging her to the very pinnacle of her shame.

"Don't you realise the rights of a wife?" I persisted. "Your husband can't cast you off like this. He can't despoil you of everything you have and then fling you aside. You're flesh and blood—you're not a garment that is threadbare."

And when I saw her poor white face staring into mine, I gave the wrench its final turn to make her agony of mind more sure. God knows I little thought.

"You're treating yourself as though you were a worthless woman, as though you were property he had bought and might chuck away at will. But you're his wife and if you never see him again—you might thank God if you didn't—you must make him support you with the last penny he has."

It was then she said it—said it in a voice that was colourless and dead; in a voice as when a prisoner pleads guilty to the vilest possibility of crime.

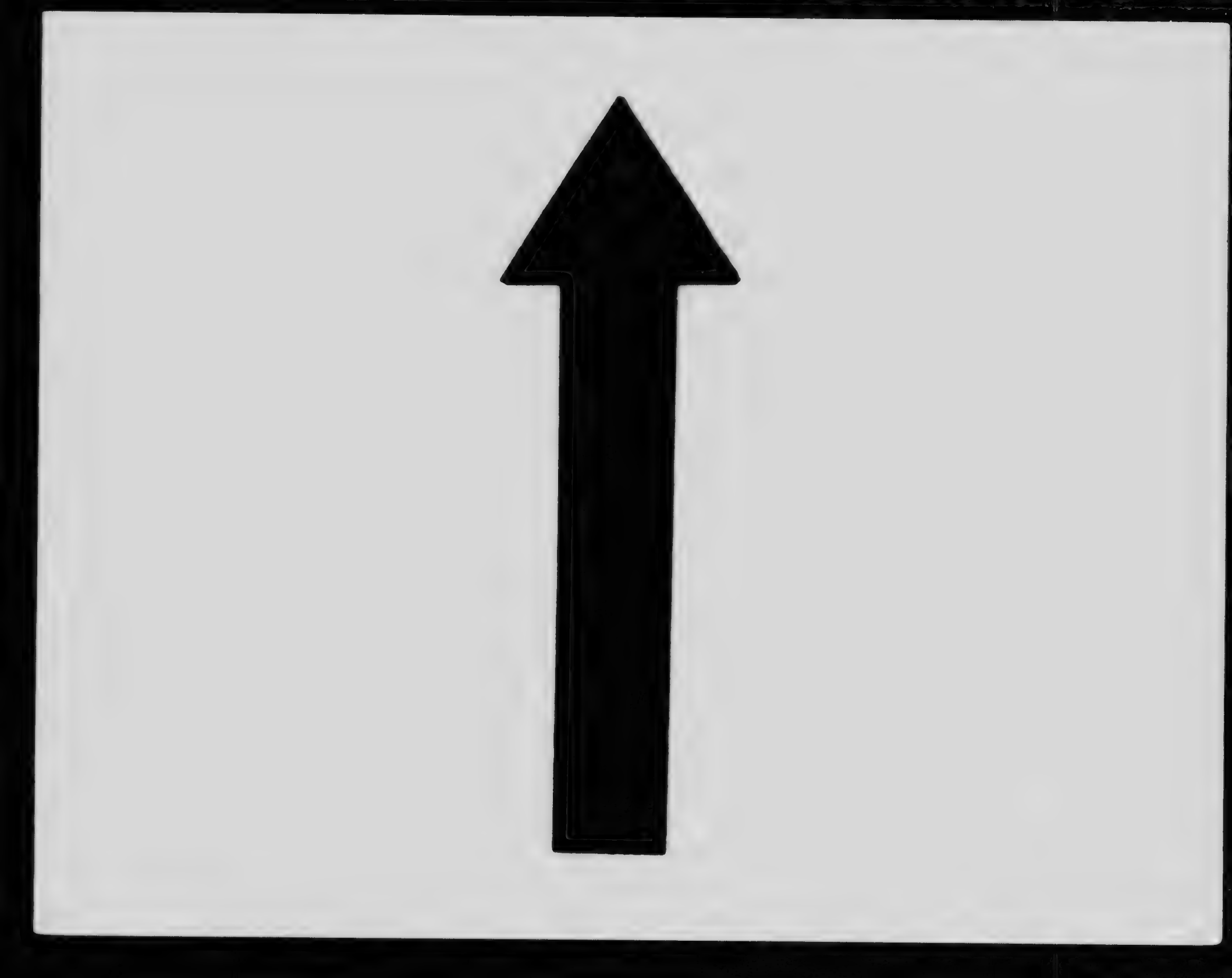
"I'm not his wife," she murmured.

Her voice was low, almost to a whisper and yet, had she shouted it, the silence coming after could not have been so great. The whole house in one moment was

made quiet. Even a hansom jangling down the street came to my ears as such a sound is meant to reach you in a play.

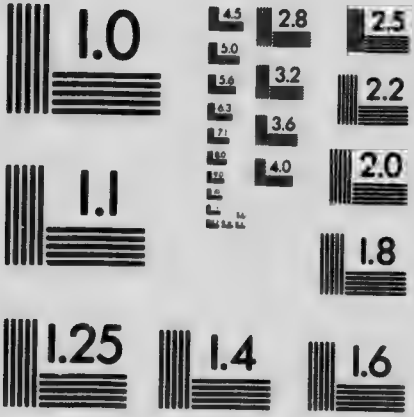
"I shall remember afterwards," I said to myself, "that I heard a hansom rattling down the street." And I have remembered it; but that thought is the only one that returns to my mind. I can see things as they were. I can see her eyes trying to reach to mine, then falling till her hands had covered them. I can see the little, huddled-up figure, full of pathos, that she presented to my eyes. I can see Mrs. Bullwell coming in through the door with her tray of things, the uncorked bottle of claret standing high and black above the dishes.

But she came too late. As she closed the door behind her, the pathetic little figure before me crumpled up like a garment that can no longer stand upon the firmness of its texture. With a weary sigh that drove a sickness to my throat, Clarissa tumbled from her chair. I found her curled, as Dandy curls himself, into a circle at my feet. But she was so still. Her body was stiller than if she slept.



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CHAPTER VIII

"Oh dear! Oh dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Bullwell, "the poor thing's fainted!"

There was a comfortable sound in that homely phrase, yet still it seemed more than mere fainting to me. Doubtless women are accustomed to these little misadventures. They think nothing of them. But with a man, and when it is the woman whom he loves, I defy him to look with equanimity at the still white face, the closed eyes and that apparent cessation of all breathing.

We lifted her on to the settee and Mrs. Bullwell began to apply those remedies which, among her sex, will never pass out of use. She undid Clarissa's collar and her dress. She patted her hands and all with that quiet assurance of manner as though it were just in the day's work.

"Poor thing, poor thing," she kept on muttering. "She do look pale, don't she? You'd think she was dead to look at her—you would indeed."

"My God! Get some brandy!" said I, "while I telephone for a doctor."

"My goodness, sir, don't go to the expense of a doctor, she'll be all right in a minute or two. It's only

a little weakness. I have 'em myself sometimes in the summer when it's hot in the kitchen. It passes off if I sit down a bit."

"Get that brandy," I repeated, and I rang up my friend Perowne.

"Will the cooking brandy do, sir?" she asked, as she went to the door.

"Cooking! Good Lord, no! Liqueur!"

By good fortune Perowne was in and promised to be with me at once. Then I turned to Clarissa. Much against her will, Mrs. Bullwell had gone for the best brandy and we were alone. I leant down my head to listen for her breathing. It was so faintly audible that I had to hold my own that I might hear it. And then, as I bent still lower, my cheek touched her lips. They were so cold; yet they set the blood racing hot in me. I rose quickly from my knees and walked to the open window. That must have been what a young man feels when first he is kissed by the first woman he loves. Events had passed so quickly with me in the last half-hour. I had been so near to one great adventure and now was near to the greatest adventure of all. It left the pulses beating in my forehead, my throat dry and every muscle in my body vibrating.

No doubt it was well that Mrs. Bullwell should come in at that moment with the brandy. It gave me something else to think about. We put the glass to her lips, but she made no effort to swallow. The brandy trickled down her chin and fell in drops upon her dress.

"She's thin, poor dear," said Mrs. Bullwell.

"Do you think," I whispered, "do you think she'll come round?"

"Why, of course she will, sir. I've never heard of no woman dying in a faint. Yes—I 'ave, though. A cousin of mine when she was a young girl, just like this young lady, she died in a faint—never came to again. We laid her on a couch just like this. We patted her hands, we gave her—well, there was no brandy in the house—but we gave her a drop of gin. But she never took no notice of nothing. She went off as though she'd gone to sleep and that was the end of her. The doctor made sure she was quite dead before we buried her."

I felt I could listen to no more of that. Another word or two from Mrs. Bullwell of that nature and she would have guessed my secret. I went out to the hall door and waited on the steps. When Perowne arrived I brought him straight into the room. He asked for no explanation. How I blessed him for that!

"Shall I go out of the room?" I asked.

"Stay where you are," said he.

So I stood staring out of the window, and not one vehicle that passed, not one human being who went by did I see. All my senses were strained to the hearing of the first sound of Clarissa's voice.

"He'll bring her round," I continually said to myself. "He'll bring her round, if anyone can."

But the silence was unbroken. It came at last to be more than I could bear. I faced round into the room.

"Can't you do anything?" said I. "Can't you bring her round again?"

He stood up and looked at me. I knew he guessed it all by then. But he only asked if there were a bed where we could put her.

"She must go to bed at once," said he.

"There's Mr. Moxon's bed," began Mrs. Bullwell.

"I'll sleep there," said I. "Put her in my room."

There was no surprise in Perowne's face, but I am sure that if Mrs. Bullwell had described her feelings she would have made some allusion to that feather which has the power to lay low a woman even of her proportions.

So we carried her upstairs and laid h on my bed. I wonder shall I ever forget the strangeness of that first sensation which the sight of Clarissa's head upon my pillow brought me. But I was not allowed to look at her for long. Perowne told me to go downstairs and wait.

"I'll come and tell you how we're getting on in a minute or two. Don't worry yourself. Have some tea."

My Lord! They are casual, these doctors! It strikes you like t when they are dealing with someone in the hollow of whose hand lies your only hope of happiness.

I went out of the room and closed the door behind me. But to take tea when such an issue as Clarissa's life was weighing in the balance! I cannot remember walking downstairs to my room. The first thing that

comes back to me is the memory of standing by my table with that little weapon in my hand which was to have done for me such wonders of legerdemain. With one touch of its bright steel trigger I was to have passed from that pit of depression—to what? The forgetfulness, the oblivion I suppose which, since my visit to Ballysheen, I had lost all power to conjure in my mind.

I think I must have stood some moments looking at it, holding it out in the palm of my open hand. At last I locked it away in an empty drawer. I had no further use for it then. I had come back to the power of something better than oblivion. Since that moment when Clarissa's lips had touched my cheek, I had discovered once more that priceless secret of remembrance. If Clarissa's life were safe it mattered little to me what issue should befall. She had come to me in trouble. I might never win her more than that. Indeed, I scarcely hoped of it. Her words on the cliffs that day at Ballysheen were always ringing in my ears. "You're ugly! You couldn't tell the truth!"

Perhaps she believed the truth was possible to me now. That she had come to me, and alone, was almost proof of it. But nothing could ever alter the other accusation. She might trust me implicitly by this, but any passion for me, that I knew was impossible. It was sufficient for me that she had placed herself in my hands. It was more than sufficient that now, with all her tragedy and her disillusionment, she might come to look upon me as her protector. Who could tell but

one day, impoverished as she was, she might let me take her to some dressmaker's and say: "Show this lady the best dresses that you've got."

Possibly that is not the way it is done. But I may learn one of these days how women manage such things.

Whatever the issue might be I knew then that I had plenty to live for. She was penniless. She was at the mercy of all I could do for her. But suddenly came the fear that she might ask me to send her back to Dominica. Yet even that, cruel a return to such hopes of mine as it might seem, would still leave me with the consciousness that I had justified my existence.

"But she won't do that," said I. "She couldn't do that. Women have bigger hearts than that—moreover, women understand. She couldn't do that."

Yet I suppose I must really have feared it, but when the door opened and Perowne closed it after him, all thoughts of what might happen in the future were gone from me. The immediate present looked at me forebodingly from his eyes.

"Well," I said quickly, "what is it? Is she better? What's happened? Have you brought her to?"

He put his hand on my shoulder.

"I suppose you kno about this?" said he.

"About what?"

"She's going to have a child."

CHAPTER IX

So far as women are concerned it has left me severely alone. Times out of number in the ambling course of these pages I have wished that it were otherwise. Now was ever the wish of a man more completely gratified than mine?

Suddenly to find myself with this child of a woman in my house, confined to my own bed, with such prospect before her is presented to my mind an attitude of incomparable bewilderment. Had the infant been placed in my arms then and there I should have known no better how to behave or what to do. For the first day I was as one who has lost his way in an elaborate maze. Turn which path I would, there seemed no way out of the business. I, whose knowledge of women was that which is attained at a respectful distance, had in one moment found myself, as it were, the expectant father of a child, with all his anxieties, all his apprehensions and alarms.

I had to learn to walk tiptoe in my room. Moxon being absent I was sent out for medicines, the prescriptions of which made me grow hot as I handed them over the chemist's counter. It is at times like these, I found, that a man realises the utter 'ittleness

of his being. He is no more than a slave, attendant at the court of the highest monarch in the world.

A nurse was immediately sent for. Her deprivations of the previous days had made Clarissa's condition precarious. She could not be moved.

When I had explained everything to Perowne he nodded his head, then he scratched it.

"How are you going to explain it to the nurse?" he asked. "Some of these women are touchy creatures. They have their ideas of babies born out of wedlock."

"Do you mean to say she'd make it uncomfortable for Clarissa?" I asked.

"Of course, you need not explain anything," he replied. "There's no essential reason why you should. Let her suspect if she likes."

"And show her suspicions! My Lord! You ought to know the judgment of a virtuous woman who barely suspects her sister of folly. Do you think I'd let that poor child suffer all the thousand little stings and arrows from the tongue of a woman who imagines her sex has been outraged? You know what she'd say. You know the way she'd say it. Never with a word. No—by Jove—if she says Mrs. Bellairs to me, I'll say Mrs. Bellairs to her."

He shrugged his shoulders and went away. I now almost believe he has guessed nothing. And how easily would a woman have known. It was but poor satisfaction, whatever way you looked at it. But I was determined that not the slightest measure of reproach should ever reach Clarissa's ears. She had fol-

lowed her Fate. God knows she has paid the woman's utmost penalty. I can conceive no greater price. In no man's reckoning enters such a sum of atonement as it is. He pays with remorse, with shame and with dishonour; but what are these beside two living eyes that gaze and gaze and gaze into your own as long as the days run on from one year to another.

There came no judgment to my mind of her. I know no man, and certainly no woman, who is qualified to judge of another in such an issue as this. It is the greatest law that Nature has made, and God—if you would differentiate between them two—has laid down His seal upon it in the little village of Bethlehem. It may violate then a million times the earthly social law; but who is there to sit in judgment over God?

And beside all this, it was Clarissa. In the heart of me, I almost think I thanked the bitter cause that had sent her hither. It brought so much that I could do for her, more than I had ever had the opportunity for doing for any other woman in the world. Surely I had cause for gratitude there.

When the nurse arrived I was more determined than before that the truth of Clarissa's condition should never be known. Nurse Barham was elderly, but unmarried—a woman of florid face and thin lips, who, having helped at the birth of so many children, had lost all proportion of romance, and, never knowing such romance of her own, had come to regard life with bitter calculation.

Immediately after my interview with her I sent for Mrs. Bullwell before they could find opportunity to exchange their confidences.

"Mrs. Bullwell," said I, "I don't know what your morals are, but that lady upstairs is my wife."

"Glory, sir!" was all she exclaimed.

"If that's an expression of praise," said I, "or satisfaction, so much the better. But you understand it, don't you? To Nurse Barham, to me, to everybody in this house, that lady is Mrs. Bellairs, and if I hear of your spreading the faintest suspicion of her being anything else, we shall have to find another place for you."

She clasped her hands as though she would pray to God that such catastrophe might never befall her. Her moral sense came second, and with an impulsive gesture she laid a fat, red hand upon my arm.

"But you will marry the poor thing, won't you, sir?" she begged. "You will marry her when it's all over?"

I took hold of the fat, red hand. There are not many moments in life when one can do these things, preserving that dignity we choose to call essential; there are not many moments, but, undoubtedly, this was one. I took hold of the fat, red hand.

"I suppose that would make you quite happy, Mrs. Bullwell," I said.

"It would, sir—believe me, there's no happiness in this world, not without you have the marriage-lines."

"But once you've got those," said I.

Her expression became ecstatic then; whereupon I gently let go her hand.

"You'd be much happier then, sir," said she.

"I should," said I.

Taking it all round, that was not such a difficult situation. I have passed through worse. It was played moreover with a woman. By no means did I relish so much the thought of telling Moxon when he returned. However, it had to be done, and when the next day he arrived back from Ireland I collared him before even a sight of Nurse Barham was permitted him.

"Moxon," said I, "here—in my room."

He came obediently and I shut the door. When I turned round, every single word I had prepared to say was gone out of my head. And I had made it up so excellently, contriving Moxon should have been spared all confusion and I what little dignity I liked to call my own. But there it was, the whole elaborate preparation had vanished. All that I could think of was that I was no longer sleeping in my own bed, but in Moxon's. It seemed more necessary that to inform him of that than of anything else, and somehow or other I stammered it out.

"But it's all right," I added quickly, when I saw the utter consternation in his face. "It's all right. You can find a room for me to-morrow, somewhere near and I'll sleep out. It's better that I should sleep out—at least, I suppose it is. I don't exactly know what the husband would do under these circumstances; I suppose he'd remain in the house."

At that moment, when Moxon's face was such a picture as memory will make graphic to my mind for the rest of my life, Nurse Barham opened the door, and in the astringent acid of her voice she said:

"Mrs. Bellairs would like to see you for a moment, sir—as soon as you can come up. It must only be for a moment."

I looked at Moxon. I know just how I looked. I meant to. He never said a word; he just watched me as I followed the nurse out of the room. When I reached the door I turned back

"You can stay here, Moxon," said I, "in this room till I come downstairs again."

Then as I climbed up to my bedroom, all thoughts of the difficulties of that situation went clean from me. Clarissa wanted to speak to me, and I could not stop the beating of my heart. This was the first time I had seen her since we had laid her tired little head on my pillow, when I had left the room with the vision of her closed eyes and the transparent whiteness of her cheeks. That vision had lasted with me till now. Now I was to see her awake; but her head would still be on my pillow.

At the door I paused, partly, I confess, to control the confusion of my emotions.

"How long may I stay?" I whispered.

"I'll come back in five minutes," the nurse replied, as she opened the door. I crept upon the tips of my toes into the room, and she closed the door after me. She closed it far less gently than I should have done,

for at the sound of it, Clarissa raised her head from the pillow. Directly she saw it was me, she let it fall back again. Perhaps it was my fancy, but I think a warm flush swept over her cheeks. Doubtless she was timid; but she could not have been so timid as was I. I crept quietly to the side of the bed, and it seemed then, in that still room, as though my heart, beating, were the only thing that moved or broke the silence.

"Are you better?" I whispered.

My body found a chair on which to seat itself.

At last I saw two eyes, full of remorse, looking at me from out of a little window made up by the bed-clothes.

"Will you—will you ever forgive me?" she said, faintly.

"Forgive what?" said I. "You mustn't talk like that. Are you worrying yourself all these hours with the idea that you've got to find forgiveness? You'll never get well that way. Besides, what is there to forgive?"

"I'm in your bed," she whispered. "Where do you sleep?"

"Is that all!" said I, laughing. "Why, do you imagine that I'm one of those fussy beggars who can't turn in anywhere but to their own bed and their own pillow? It is comfortable though; isn't it?"

She nodded her head and squeezed down under the clothes. How could that devil ever have left her!

"But that's not all," she continued, presently,

from the little hive of bedclothes within which she lay curled; "that's not all. You haven't heard what the nurse calls me."

"I have indeed," said I, "but don't be angry with me for that. It couldn't be helped. It was the only way. I did it because of the nurse. I think she's a silly woman. At any rate, she wouldn't have understood. It's a false position for you I know. But you mustn't be angry with me. I did it for the best."

I suppose her illness had made her weak; but even then I cannot quite understand it, for when I said that she buried her face in the pillows and all her body shook with weeping. Of course, the nurse came in at that moment. I might have expected it. I believe they have an uncanny way of knowing when they are not wanted; moreover, if they see the faintest sign of affection they will put a stop to it. No doubt they are quite right. They hate it. This creature must have hated it more than most, for when she found Clarissa crying she turned on me in the severest contempt.

"Why have you been making her cry?" she said. "Surely she's weak enough without distressing her like that!"

Upon my soul I felt a fool. The man who is swayed between two emotions is bound to fall between them and look ridiculous. I wanted to turn the detestable woman out of the house straight away. On the other hand, there was Clarissa crying her heart out, and I knew well enough it was bad for her.

"Will you kindly go now?" she continued. "I can't have my patient upset like this."

I went, as quietly too as I had come. But when I got downstairs I could have cheerfully kicked anything that came in my way. It was a bad prospect for Moxon. I nearly slammed the door as I came in, but remembered just in time. At a violent strain I caught it just before it closed.

Things cut both ways in life. At least that is what I find. This little burst of irritation went far towards making it easier for me to tell Moxon. I flung the information at him then.

"Now," said I, when I had finished, "if this sort of establishment has become one with which you have no desire to be connected, don't hesitate to say so. I don't know when the child will be born—nobody knows. It's supposed to be in three months' time; but however long it is, if it were the whole nine months, Miss Fawdry would still stay here under my protection till it was over. To begin with, she's ill. She can't be moved. And when she's well again the position will be no different. I tell you this plainly, because I don't want there to be any misunderstanding. Of course, when she's well again she may say that she doesn't wish to stay. That'll be a different matter. I shall do my best to persuade her, and so long as she's here under these circumstances she's Mrs. Bellairs. Now, you've heard this, if you don't want to stay on I'd sooner you said so. I know your ideas about this sort of thing. You remember my asking you that night last April,

when I sent you to fetch a taxi for that woman who was drenched with rain, you remember my asking you if you would refuse to help a woman in trouble."

"Do you happen to remember my answer, sir?"

"Well,"—upon my soul, for the minute, it had gone clean out of my mind—"I don't remember the exact words," said I. "I fancy you disapproved."

"Excuse me, sir, but I think I remarked that to my knowledge I hadn't said nothing about no woman."

I suppose if two negatives make an affirmative, one may take it that three in the ordinary course of progression revert to the former order of things. He had said nothing about a woman. I did remember that. I remembered also how that tactful observation had nonplussed me. It had much the same effect now. I felt that I was losing ground, and dignity with it too; for dignity, after all, is only the ground you stand upon. There was only one thing to do, to return as quickly as possible to what I had been saying.

"Well, you see the situation," said I; "if you wish to get another place, I shall be pleased to give you the best possible recommendation."

Of course, I could see that it was a terrible shock to him. To any man who would preserve an attitude of disapproval towards all women, it would be an uncomfortable position in which to find himself. I sympathised with him sincerely, but there was no help for it. I had to put it that way for his own sake, though I knew well what his answer would be. He no more disapproves of women than do I. It is only this

attitude which he adopts as a counterblast for the want of approval in women for him. Even Mrs. Bullwell he treats with a stern aloofness of manner, though I have known him take a vase of daffodils which I had condemned as faded and place them in her kitchen. He was careful enough to tell her that it was by my instructions. She thanked me for them herself, but I said nothing to him. And now to have to accept the circumstance of a woman in the house, to be compelled to speak of her as Mrs. Bellairs, to know that she was occupying my bed; that in the near future she would be performing that most terrible of all functions—which I have heard him thank God was left only to women to do—the bringing of a child into the world; to be driven to all this and still to maintain his dignity as a man who has avowed his superior toleration of the whole sex—it was a bad business for Moxon. He did not like the look of it at all.

But I had given him the only loophole for escape. To tell the honest truth, I could not possibly have done without him, and putting it this way, laying myself under an obligation to him should he consent to remain, was the only method I could devise on the moment for keeping him with me.

"What are you going to decide?" said I.

"Well, sir," and he paused. It is this way he gathers weight for his utterances. "I think I know my place. I shouldn't question anything you do, sir, not if I was to be in your service for a hundred years."

"That means you're going to question it now," said I.

"Not at all, sir, I was only going to say that you're the best judge of what you do."

"When any one says that," I observed, "they mean you are the very worst judge possible. Go on. It's extremely interesting to hear what you say and know what you mean. I am behaving extremely injudiciously —well?"

This was far too much for Moxon. To have all his tactful diplomacy shorn of its tinsel wrappings and before his very eyes was more than he could bear. His wit, moreover, was not equal to it. At last I had nonplussed him. His last effort was merely a *tour de force;* but it was too good for me.

"Do you want me to go, sir," said he.

Well, I had to throw up my hand then. In a matter of this kind some one or the other has to make a sacrifice of dignity. I have never been engaged in such an encounter where both retained it till the end.

"Want you to go," said I. "Upon my soul, I don't know what I should do without you."

A big smile of gratitude spread all over his face. It was as good as if he had held out his hand, and far more respectful.

"Well, if there's anything I can do for Mrs. Bellairs, sir——"

Of course, this was overdoing it. He meant well, but you can see yourself that it was overdoing it. Accordingly, he got no more than he deserved. I sent him out to the chemist with an awful prescription.

CHAPTER X

I BELIEVE one can disarm even Destiny. God knows what might not have happened had that child been born in such surroundings as Clarissa found herself before she came to me. You may be sure the poor little mite would have been sorely in the way. God knows what might not have happened.

But so far as I was concerned with Clarissa, it was welcome. It would give her something to live for who had so little of her own. I was prepared to do my best that it should not be ushered into a world which shuddered at its coming.

Once only in the few times that I saw her Clarissa spoke of it.

"It will be so terrible for you," she said.

"Terrible?" said I. "But why? It's your child. By no right or consideration is it his. You've suffered for it. That's the only right of possession. It won't be terrible at all. I just think of it as your child. He doesn't enter my head."

That was a lie, but worth telling, since it made her mind the easier. He does enter into my thoughts. I burn hot with foolish anger sometimes when I think

of him. But all this was disarming Destiny, and Destiny disarmed does strange and unexpected things.

Perowne came late one night at a summons from the nurse. I heard the door of Clarissa's bedroom open and close many times that night. All through the hour I lay awake listening, revolving in my mind a thousand meanings of what it could be. At last I could bear the vague speculation of it no longer. I crept out of my room and button-holed Perowne as he came downstairs.

"I can't stand this," said I. "What is it?"

"The child," said he.

"Born?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"Dead."

Dead? It meant nothing to me. I knew then it had never held life at all in my mind. That it was still-born seemed to me then the only natural thing that could happen.

"It was what I expected," he added, "after the condition we found her in when she first came here. She was half-starved."

"How is she now?" I asked.

"Not very lively. She'll get all right again though, if she takes it quietly."

So we crept silently through the month of March to that glorious First of April, when the whole world awakes to the great gladness of its folly. For the first two weeks of that month of March I was not permitted

to see her. Then I would spend my mornings in the park, intent no longer upon watching the romance of others, but contemplating in long silences the wonderful possibilities of my own. What would it be when she was well again? All hope that I might win her for myself I counted beyond the utmost probability. Such disfigurement as is mine, once a woman has expressed her horror of it, is not forgotten so easily as that. So at least it seemed to me. And as I sat or walked in the park, journeying so far sometimes as the gardens in Kensington to see the crocuses and the young tulips rising above the earth, I thought it all out, making in my imagination the future I would have for her.

I built a cottage then in the country—an old-fashioned place standing far back from the road. with a tiny orchard of gnarled apple trees and a garden where all the sweet peas in the world could grow in such profusion as would shame even Cruikshank himself. It should be within fifty miles of London, so that whenever she needed me I could easily reach her. For a few hundred pounds the freehold of a place like that could be bought, and it should be her very own. The little that it would cost for her to live there, she would surely accept at my hands.

"She's at my mercy," I told myself, cheerfully. "Can she possibly want anything better than that."

There were other schemes too. I spent a glorious morning devising them. But none pleased me better than this, and I longed for the moment when I might tell her of it.

In the afternoons of that fortnight I wrote long letters to Bellwattle, telling her everything, leading up slowly by the most gradual degrees to that moment when I could ask for my gift to be returned to me. It is a mean thing to do, to give a thing and take a thing. Surely there is some condemnatory couplet which treats of such instability as this.

"Give a thing and take a thing——"

I have long forgotten how it goes. But surely, with a lonely man and his dog it were excusable. I had word from her that he was happy enough when out on the cliffs alone with her, where there was ever the great adventure of the chase. But she hinted sometimes how in the long evenings he would sit thoughtfully before the fire taking no notice of any word that was said to him. I like to think it was then that he thought of me.

At length came that morning when the nurse told me Clarissa was up in her room, sitting before the fire, and that I might take my tea with her in the afternoon.

Before breakfast then Moxon and I went to Covent Garden.

"I just want to get a few flowers," said I.

We staggered back under the weight of those flowers. Freezias, tulips—even lilac there was. Moxon's face grew scarlet among the yellow tulips as he bore them bravely homeward. I sent them up to Clarissa's room before me. When at last I knocked at the door and was admitted, I found her with her face buried in a great bowl of flowers, and her eyes were

closed. If you would see into the very heart of the spring, your eyes must be closed. Nurse Barham was not in the room, so I just stood by waiting till she should open them.

Presently she raised her head. The look in her eyes was as though the spring still filled them, and out went my heart quickly beating to it. I would have given much had that glance been meant for me. That, in some measure I had been the cause of it was good enough to know.

"When you're able to get out again," said I, "you'll find everything like that in the country."

"Ah, yes," she replied, "in the country. I suppose all the banks in Ballysheen now are filled with primroses."

"No doubt they've opened their current account," said I. Then I sat down and looked closely at her face. "Do you mean to tell me," I went on, "that you're regretting Ballysheen now?"

"Seeing a little of Ballysheen was better than seeing a lot of London," she admitted. "You don't know how often I've tossed and turned, lying awake in that bed, thinking how right you were. Oh—you were right!"

"When?"

"All that you said to me on the cliff that day—all about everything—about forgetting that you lived—about remembering that you lived. I've been trying so hard to forget," she sighed, deeply, "and I'm so tired of trying. If you hadn't taken care of me, I

should have given up trying. Perhaps that would have been best too. I sometimes think it would have been much the best."

"Wait till you see the country again," I said. "You won't be sorry then. The tulips are up in Kensington Gardens—all the almond trees are pink. You wait till you get up—wait, too, till you've heard what I've got to suggest."

She glanced at me quickly.

"I can't take anything more from you," she began.

"You can wait," said I, "till you hear what I've got to say. Shall we have tea now or afterwards?"

"Afterwards. Perhaps you want your tea, though."

"So far as I am concerned," I replied, "everything can wait."

"Well, then—go on."

For a moment I wondered whether we had better not have tea, whether it were not wiser to wait until that light of excitement had gone out of her eyes. When again she begged me go on, I forgot about it; I was excited myself. For a whole two weeks I had pictured this moment of telling her. The best of us are inconsiderate when it comes to such a pass as this. I was going to show her my little castle in Spain, and it is these habitations of which we are proudest. With my own hands, as I sat in the park those mornings, I had built that little Tudor cottage with its apple orchard, where the sheep grazed in and out between the white-washed trunks. With my own hands I

had laid the old garden, planting it with all those old flowers that will remain in every garden so long as England is what she is. Is there any wonder I was proud of it—any wonder that I wanted to tell her of it all just so fast as I could ?.

She listened with eyes round in wonder. Sometimes her fingers clasped and unclasped, and she beat her little hands about like a child who has something good to eat.

"There are hundreds of places like that in Kent," said I, when I had finished. "Kent is full of them; and when the apple blossom is out and lambs are in the orchard, I can tell you you want to live then. You want to be up with the sun lest you should miss an hour of it. I've been all round the world, but I've never seen anything to touch an apple orchard in Kent, or any English meadow in the heat of summer. I know nothing like it—I know nothing equal to it, unless it is those cliffs at Ballysheen when the gorse and the heather are out and the whole place throbs with the humming of bees. That, perhaps, is as good. But it's too far away. I want you to have a place where, if ever you need me, you can send for me at a moment's notice. There would be times, perhaps, when you might feel lonely."

She had been looking down into the fire, interlacing her fingers, doing and undoing them as in an idle moment, a child plaits rushes in the silent meadows. But when I said she might feel lonely, she looked up quickly to my face.

"Did you mean to go alone?" she asked, "to live there—quite alone?"

"There would be some one to help you look after it," said I.

"Yes—but—otherwise, alone."

"Who else is there that you know?" I asked.

She shook her head.

"No one?"

"I don't know anybody."

"But if you feel what you do about the country," said I. "I don't think you'd be lonely. And if ever you wanted me—at any time—I could come down. There'd be some inn at the village where I could put up."

"Where you could put up?"

"Yes—where I could sleep."

She gazed at me quite strangely, and so direct were her eyes that I remember wondering was she forgetting how repulsive I was. I believe that thought would have grown upon me. I believe, had she looked at me thus a moment longer, I should have taken the bull of fortune by the horns. I should have tried my luck, risking that refusal which I believed to be inevitable, whereby it would have been thrown back at me once more the eternal knowledge of myself. But at that moment two things occurred. I, who will have no mirror in my room, was suddenly confronted by my reflection in a little handglass of Clarissa's that leant against the back of an empty chair. She had been arranging herself, no doubt, before I came into the room; for it is ever the way with women that

they must appear at their best, even to those whom least it should concern.

But it was not that which kept back the words then faltering on my lips. Clarissa's lip had trembled. Before another moment had passed she was in tears. It was not only weakness this time. Some spirit of courage had broken within her. She had given way.

Amazed though I was, I let her cry awhile before I questioned her; then, leaning nearer, I begged her tell me what it was.

"I—I couldn't be there alone," she faltered. "I—I couldn't bear it alone. Oh—I must have a little pride! I can't take anything more from you. You have given me so much as it is. I want to go home. I want to go back to Dominica. I wish to God I'd gone when you told me to last year. I should have been spared all this. You would have been spared it, too. Let me go back to Dominica."

"You'd sooner that," said I, "than the castle in Spain—the cottage in Kent?"

"Yes—I couldn't be there alone. Oh—I know what a disgrace I am. Do let me go."

"You're sure of what you say?" I repeated.

"Yes—yes—quite sure."

I shrugged my shoulders and rose to my feet.

"God who made women," said I, "must understand 'em. You shall go back to Dominica."

And I left her.

CHAPTER XI

It was a day early in the month of May when I said good-bye to Clarissa. The next day following that afternoon when she had expressed her wish to go home, I went away myself, leaving her in the care of Moxon with instructions that when she was ready to return to Dominica, I should be sent for. How could I have stayed on there in the house, seeing her possibly every day, knowing that each hour was drawing nearer to that moment when my life was to be empty once more? It was better to train myself to the knowledge of it at once, wherefore I went away seeking the loneliness that was bound to come.

I sometimes think she felt my absence a little during her convalescence; but there is more hope than belief in the thought.

We were very silent as we drove to the station. What, indeed, was there to say? I find that it is not only sufficient that a woman should come to you in trouble, for when she goes, she leaves a whole world of trouble behind her. I suppose I must have taken it for granted in my mind that if she came, she would stay. It can only be then that I am utterly ignorant of women. How indeed should I be otherwise?

I did my best, but so hopelessly failed to understand her tears when, just before the train started, she broke down completely and wept.

"But you're going home," said I, "you're doing the thing you have chosen to be best."

Yet still she cried and muttered brokenly of the kindness I had shown her.

"No one in the world could have been so kind," she said.

"It's been the best time of my life," I replied. "There have even been moments when I've thanked God for your troubles since, in a way, I was able to bear them."

At that she buried her face in her hands and for some moments I could get no word from her at all. She sobbed as though her heart were breaking and I sat there on the seat opposite to her wondering why God had made creatures so incomprehensible as women. She wanted of her own accord to return to Dominica, yet here she was at her departure, crying as though a very world of desolation was before her. It was more than I could understand.

I had to leave the carriage at last. She still sat there weeping, with the bundle of picture papers which I had bought lying on her lap. It was only as the train began to move out of the staton that she threw them on to the seat beside her and, rising impulsively to her feet, she leant out of the window.

"Why," she whispered excitedly, "why have you been so good to me?"

I could have laughed at that. For surely she must have guessed by this; but thank God a sense of the ludicrous saved me from telling her then that I loved her. Imagine the declaration of a lover, running by the side of the carriage as a train steamed out of the station.

"God bless you," was all I said and for a long while I stood watching that little white face of hers as she leant out of her carriage window. Suddenly then, so quickly as if some one had drawn her back within, she disappeared. At that I turned away and walked home alone.

It was two days later that Moxon brought me a telegram to my room.

"*Come over at once,*" it read, "*most important that I should see you.*" And it was signed Bellwattle.

"Is the boy waiting for an answer?" I asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Give me a form then."

He brought it to me.

"*Coming,*" I wrote and handed it back to him. "Pack my things," said I, "I'm off to Ireland this evening."

I acted with as little hesitation as that, for I more than welcomed the thought of leaving London. There was beading of green through all that black lace-work of the trees, and often I had felt the yearning that must come to every one of us, that calling of the land, when one's eyes need to be filled with the broad stretches, when one's feet long for the springy turf and all one's heart aches for the great freedom of God's heaven above one's

head. And beside all that, I knew I should soon be seeing Dandy once more.

It would be impossible to count the memories that filled my mind when again I mounted Quin's car and set out upon that nine mile journey from Youghal to Ballysheen. Every corner of the road brought back to my remembrance the day when I had arrived, the day also when I had gone back to London feeling how utterly the madness of my mission had failed.

It was a long time before I spoke a word to Quin who, though the day was fine enough, drove just as ever with that fixed despondency of expression in his face.

"Are you never cheerful," said I at last, "not even on a day like this?"

He looked at me in astonishment.

"What would I be cheerful about?" he asked.

"Good God, man!" said I; "look all round you."

"What for?" said he.

"For everything. God's in His heaven."

"He is indeed," said Quin. "And as far as this country's concerned I'm afraid 'tis the way He'll stay there."

I laughed at that; but his face had no sign of mirth in it.

"They're goin' to give us Home Rule," he continued. "Shure, Glory be to God, what'll we be doin' rulin' ourselves whin Tim Burke and Jim Reilly were fightin' yesterday at the council meeting as to whether the new lamp-post in Dorgan Street should be put opposite Jim Reilly's house or Tim Burke's?"

"And which did they decide?" I asked.

"Shure, they didn't decide at all. Why would they? They fought like two creatures from hell till Michael Mahony got up and said the only way to settle it was to have no lamp-post at all. 'Twas the judgment av Solomon, he said—but yirrah, what the divil's the judgment of Solomon to do with Dorgan Street? Shure, I dunno know who Solomon was. He might have been a Jew by the sounds av him. 'Tis Dorgan Street anyways that'll have no lamp-post and 'tis as dark there in that street on a night ye couldn't see yeer own fisht to shtrike a man with. Ye could not. An' if they come to do with the land as they did with Dorgan Street, I want to know what the hell is Home Rule goin' to be to us thin?"

"But, good heavens!" said I. "You've been crying for Home Rule for more than a century!"

"We have indeed," said he, "but God help us, we never expected to get ut. An' now they're talkin' of Johnnie Redmond, the hero. Faith, the only heroes in Ireland are the min like Emmet, who died for his country, and didn't get what he wanted even then. Shure, Johnnie Redmond is no hero. He's a prosperous man. He'll be wearin' a diamond shtud in his shirt front before long, and dhrivin' down Pathrick Street in Cork in a carriage and pair on a Sathurday afternoon for the people to look at him. Shure, that's no hero. 'Tis he'll have the lamp-post in front of his house if there are any goin'. He will indeed."

"The fact of the matter is," said I, when I had done

with laughing, "that if they give you Home Rule you'll have nothing to complain about, and this'll be a dead country."

"I dunno will ut be a dead country," he replied. "Ye wouldn't have called ut a dead country if ye'd heard what Jim Reilly said to Tim Burke at the last council meetin'. An' it'll all be just about as alive as that."

"What did he say?"

"I should have to be very hot in anger to repeat ut," said he.

So as I drove again from Youghal to Ballysheen I received my second lesson in this glorious sad country. Dead or alive I was glad to be back in it. Even those few weeks the year before had been long enough to plant the call of it in my heart. For there is something in Ireland to those who know it well, which cries to you in the long nights and, in the summer days, holds out its arms mutely appealing to you to return. Indeed, I was glad to be back, and when at the gateway I was met by Dandy and Bellwattle I knew only of one other thing I could have wished more earnestly to see. Even that I forgot while Bellwattle was gripping my hand and Dandy was leaping wildly by my side.

"We're so glad to have you back," said she. "Look at him."

She pointed to Dandy, who stood upon his hind legs, rending the air with hilarious laughter.

"Hooray! hooray!" he yelled, and had he worn a thousand hats on his head he would have flung them

all up in the air at once. A welcome like that is worth coming many miles for. Even Cruikshank in his quiet way was exuberant in spirits.

"Good man!" he kept saying. "Good man." As though I had accomplished some feat of virtue by my arrival.

But it was not till we sat down to lunch that I asked what had been the meaning of that important telegram.

"Why was it most important that you should see me?" I asked, and looked from one to the other as I put the question.

Cruikshank kept his eyes fixed upon his plate, whereby I knew that this was a moment when silence was expected of him. I turned my eyes to Bellwattle.

"Well!" said I.

She drank some water from her glass before she answered me. The pause, in fact, was most elaborate.

"It's to do with the cottage," she replied, at last.

"What cottage?"

"In the hollow. Cruikshank has done it up, furnished it, with the idea of letting it for the spring and summer. Autumn, too, if any one wanted it. We thought you'd like to stay there this summer—not, of course, to our letting but our invitation. We——"

"You'd better say yes," interrupted Cruikshank.

"He needn't say yes till he's seen it," Bellwattle broke in again.

I looked from one to the other. My eyes rested last on Bellwattle.

"Like a true prophet," said I, "you're working hard to bring your prophecy true."

"What prophecy?"

"That I should come to the cottage this year. But if I do stay it won't be true to the letter. There'll only be a colouring of truth in it. You said live there. I told you that was impossible."

"Oh—eat your lunch," said Cruikshank, "and go up with Bellwattle afterwards. There's no compulsion for you to stay if you don't like it. There's a bed-room ready for you here."

"Is he cross?" I inquired.

"Do I look it?" asked Cruikshank.

I had to admit that he did not. There was a twinkle of light in his eye the whole time that he was speaking.

It was soon after lunch then that I found myself with Bellwattle and Dandy making our way once more up that old boreen where they tell me the white hemlocks grow so high in summer and the wild geraniums break, in patches of colour, the ever freshening wonder of the glorious green.

Heavens! What a rush of memory it brought, carrying me back to that first morning when Bellwattle had brought me up to see the cottage in the hollow. Were they the same sheep grazing there, lifting their heads to stare at us as we swung open the same old gate, whose rusty hinges played the very tune it had played last year? Doubtless they were the very same. This crying for everlasting change is only the restless craving of a neurotic race. There is change enough in the

seasons, change enough in the sky to fulfil every requirement of my soul; only that I need another to note those changes with me.

Here the whole summer, the whole autumn and winter had passed with every varied colour and design. The spring was back again, and the whole world about us was the same once more as it had been the previous year. The gulls were beating up against the thrusting wind; the songs of larks rose like glittering bells, trilling and tinkling in the bright air above us. Now the gorse was in its full blazonry of yellow, and all the heather buds shook out their music to each little breeze.

As my feet first felt the yielding turf beneath them, I stood still, took off my hat, threw back my head and let the warm, white sun burn down upon my skin.

"Oh, my God!" I muttered, "how wonderful this is!"

"And you might have had it always," said Bellwattle.

I looked at her swiftly. There was more than just what she said. In the tone of her voice I detected a thousand things to which my imagination leapt for answer.

"What do you mean?" said I.

"Why did you send Clarissa home?" she asked.

"Why? Because it was her own wish. Because she wanted to go."

"Never tell me you know anything about women again," said she.

"I was not aware that I'd said anything about any

woman," I replied, and then I tried hard to think where I had heard that excellently evasive remark before. For the moment I could not trace it. I was, moreover, too interested in what she had yet to say. "Wasn't that a good enough reason?" I added.

She shook her head as she smiled at me.

"Clarissa never wanted to go home. Do you think a woman ever wants to leave a man who has treated her as you did?"

"If she finds him as repulsive to look at as Clarissa found me," said I.

For a few steps we walked without speaking again. Then she stopped me and looked squarely in my face. There was almost that light in her eyes which I have seen in Dandy's, which I remember having seen in my mother's. I felt almost then as though I might be as other men are.

"Do you know," said she, gently, "that you're morbid about—about——"

"My ugliness."

"You can call it that if you like. You think it debars you from winning. It doesn't. It's only a handicap. I never saw any one so easy first as you must have been with Clarissa."

I gripped her arm quickly. My fingers must have hurt her, for she just winced but made no effort to draw away. It was like a mother giving her boy a hand to squeeze while he was in pain.

"How do you know this?"

"I guessed it."

"When? How?"

"When we went to see Clarissa at Queenstown on her way through."

"You saw her, then?"

"Yes—we went straight off, Cruikshank and I, directly we heard she was coming."

"And she told you?"

"No—I guessed it."

"Then why didn't she stay when I offered her the cottage in Kent?"

"You offered it for her alone. It was like hitting her in the face when she knew she deserved it. She had lived with another man. You had nothing better to offer her than that. But you would have offered her better, wouldn't you?"

"Great heavens, yes! If I thought she'd have taken it."

"I think she would," said Bellwattle. "Now I'm going to sit down here. I'm tired. You go on to the cottage. Don't stay too long. Cruikshank's waiting for us. Go on. Don't mind me."

I think I was glad to be alone then. I wanted to go back every step in my memory of those days in London and count if she were right. So, retracing it all, I came at last to the cottage.

The ground was already being laid out for the garden, and there I stood for some moments thinking what yet might be possible, if all that Bellwattle had said were true. If it should ever be so, we would make that garden together, Clarissa and I, remembering with

every seed we sowed, with every flower we tended, that not one moment of Life is to be forgotten—that the whole world, as was that little plot of ground, is a garden of resurrection, where the seeds of promise are ever bringing forth the flowers of remembrance, whose seed again is scattered to the generous earth by the autumn winds.

I made up my mind then that if ever such contentment of Life should come to me, I would make it a hobby to cultivate some new species of sweet pea. Of how these things are done I am as ignorant as the babe unborn. Still, in that moment, I made the determination.

"I will call it Clarissa," said I.

Then every year together we would sow the seeds of it afresh, planting in the mould by their side that little stake of wood, washed white with lime, whereon Clarissa's name should be inscribed. It would serve to help us to remembrance even of death—the remembrance that burial is but the sowing of a seed in God's great garden of resurrection. And then, if ever it came to be my lot to see the small white gravestone on which Clarissa's name should be engraved, I might remember the words of Maeterlinck, "There are no dead," and in the years that followed, myself sow and look forward to the sweet pea in my own small garden and, finding it, achive some understanding.

"All this shall be," said I, "if what Bellwattle has said is true."

Then at last I opened the door. The kitchen had

been turned into a sitting-room. A chair was drawn up to a cheery fire before which, as I entered, some one rose to meet me. I felt my heart beat sick with joy.

It was Clarissa!

Clarissa in her gown of canary-coloured satin.

THE END

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